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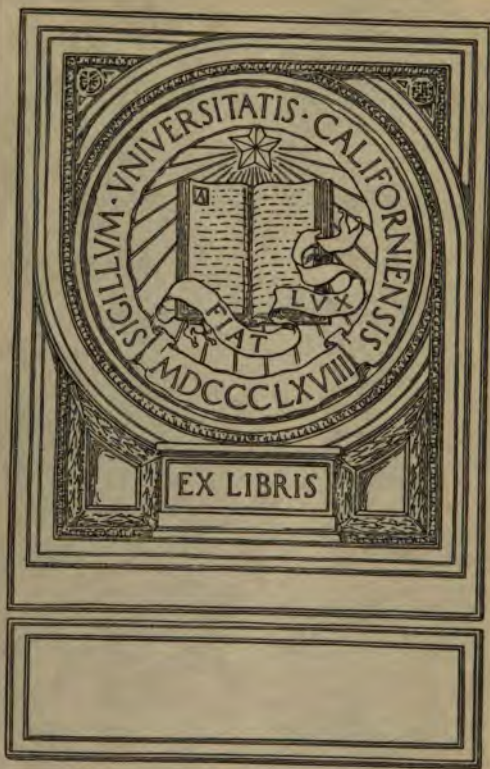
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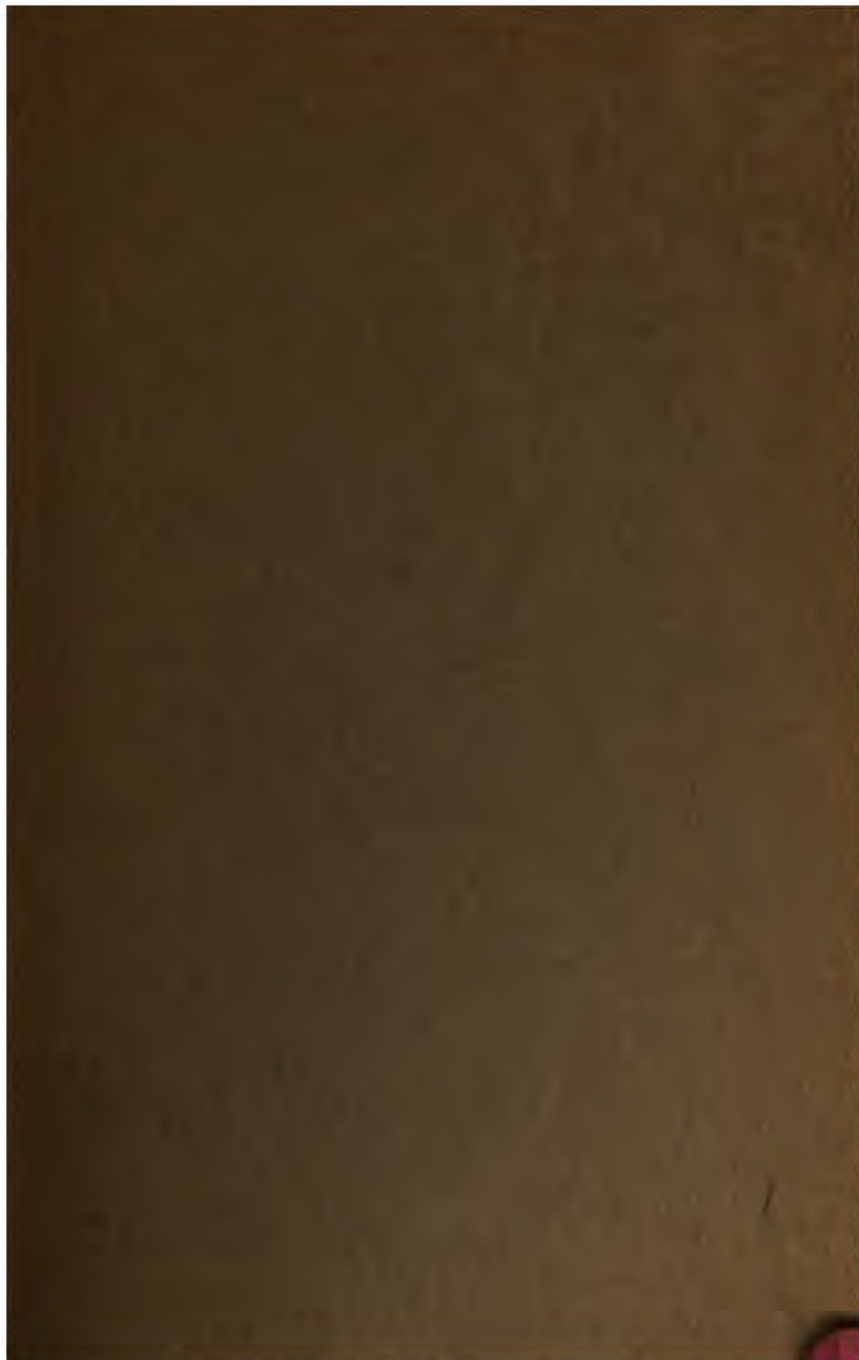
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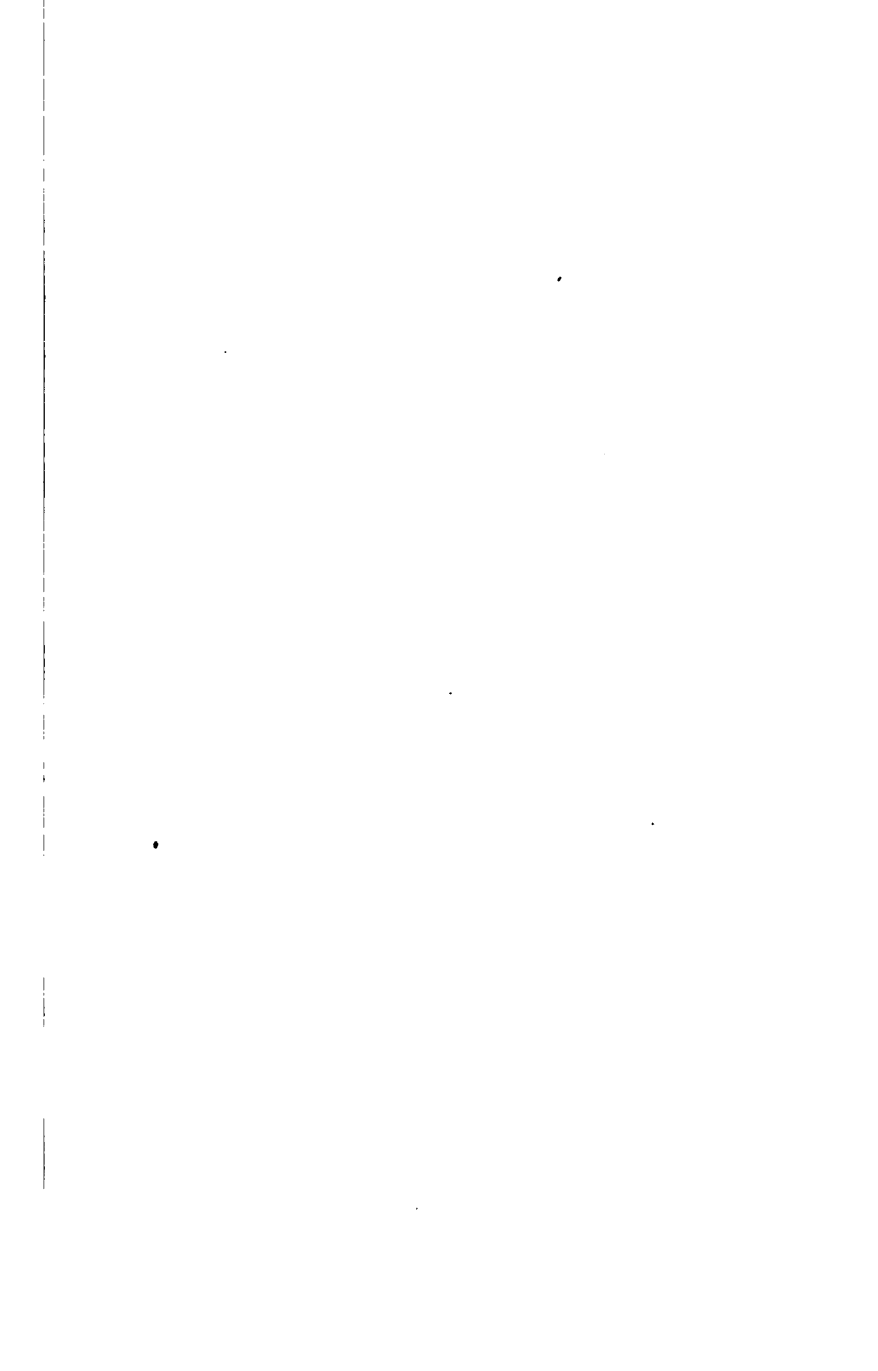
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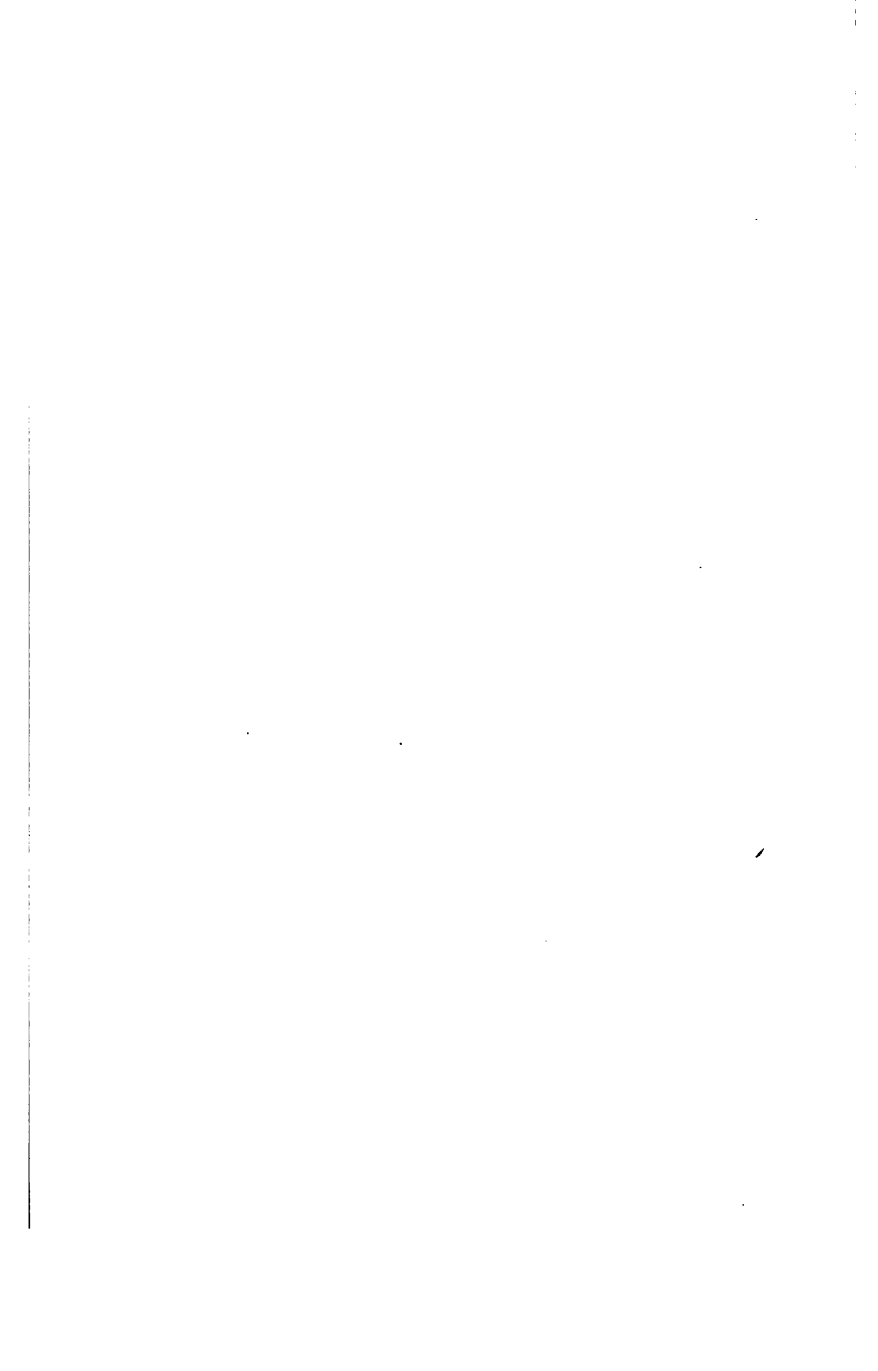


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PART I

DUKE JONES

I

THE MOON OF DISCOVERY

I

JONES,—E. M. Jones, according to the hotel books,—was the name of the man who broke upon the consciousness of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Shovell in the last half of their honeymoon: who filled their whole horizon with a rapidity quite inexplicable to those who were unacquainted with the peculiarities of this young couple; and who became forthwith the central figure of so much unnecessary curiosity, airy conjecture, analytical discussion, and emphatic dissension between them, that even their best friends would have trembled for the future if they had overheard some of it.

But nobody overheard; for Mrs. Charles was exquisitely careful of people's feelings always, and imposed a like discretion, so far as was possible, on her husband. Jones, the new objective in both their lives, was really Violet's discovery, since he chanced to sit next her at table-d'hôte; but so cleverly transferred to Charles, that he continued to think Jones his own protégé from first to last, and barely felt the first stirring of jealousy, so far as his wife was concerned.

It would, indeed, have been hard for any gentleman, even newly-wedded, to be jealous of Jones in any circumstances, he was so intensely uninteresting. He had absolutely no distinguishing features, and would have baffled the most practised novelist, or detective, to describe. He came as near as possible to being invisible, when you

glanced down the double rank of the dinner-table: and was practically inaudible when he spoke, contributing nothing noteworthy to any dialogue in which he took part, only existing, so to express it, in speech. There was probably a Jones in every hotel of that sea-front, had all been known, existing in the same innocuous manner. When Charles, after his second early-morning encounter, on the way to bathe, said Jones had been born without an aura,—that was what he meant.

But everybody had an aura for Violet, and neither of the pair was easily discouraged, when really set upon social researches; and a seaside hotel, in the month of June, affords many such opportunities. How they came to be in such a place would have required explanation, not to say apology, in the opinion of their careful friends. The recorder can but state the facts. After ten days or so of the regulation blissful placidity, in a nice house lent by a nice relation of the bride's mother, where they had extensive grounds to walk in, with stable, garage, and appendages at their entire disposal, Violet and Charles removed themselves, without any notice, to a populous hotel, facing one of the most frequented bays in the south-west corner of our island, where they were not nearly so comfortable or so private as they had been at Ingestre Hall: where they had to pay for every advantage to which they were accustomed at about double its cost price, and could not get a self-respecting horse, or a car fit to look at, for love or money. What they gained they alone could say; but they were thoroughly satisfied with the proceeding,—and neglected to warn most of their acquaintance where they had vanished to.

Violet sent, of course, a lovely letter to her mother's relative, the master of the house they had quitted, enumerating its charms, and abusing their own miserable unworthiness of its blessings. She said her husband would gladly have remained there; but that she had a sudden morbid curiosity to see an English watering-place

in the summer season, having never, during the twenty years of her unmarried existence, had the chance. So she and Charles had got out all the maps in Mr. Ingestre's library, and fixed on a place with a nice name. She did not disclose what name, though she said they had avoided Blackpool, which sounded so darkly romantic, with difficulty. She added that she had put the maps away where she had found them, that she had stolen none of the books she most coveted, and that her cousin John's librarian was evidently a wonderful man.

Mr. Ingestre laughed over the letter, which was neatly worded, and nicely written, and asked his wife if she thought the girl was tired of her bargain already. His wife replied that she was only spoiled and flighty, and that probably the young fellow wanted to spend some of his easily-acquired wealth.

These remarks will be sufficient to show the way the maternal connection in general spoke of Violet's match among themselves: the father's side was naturally different. It was Ashwins solely that Violet and Charles admitted to the secret of their elopement; though even there, by an elaborate and unnecessary system of letters under cover, they gave them as much trouble as possible in finding out their real address. This was Charles, as need barely be mentioned: due to Charles' passion for plotting solely. The tale of the flight from Ingestre Hall, when properly worked up by Mr. Shovell, with the aid of countless cigarettes, upon the beach, would have made quite an effective column for a society paper.

"It happened by night," he wrote to his step-sister and Violet's cousin, Margery Brading, "when owls were flitting and bats hooting about the Hall. Bats in the high Hall garden—you know how it goes on. There happens to be a night express to these parts (wherever they are), as Violet discovered from Bradshaw. I took her word for it. I thought she never used trains, but she says she does 'on occasion.' I own I was disappointed in her. You see,

ever since we got to the Hall, she had been making up to the Ingestres' chauffeur, anyone would have said with an ulterior purpose in the near future. But when taxed, she disclaimed it, only remarking that she liked the man. Of course, I said no more. I bowed to Bradshaw with 'Be it so.'

"I did not for a moment suppose V. had found a train that really existed, being unused to such things, but, as it transpired, she had. Towards nine on a moonless night we started, several of the Ingestre retainers holding torches on the steps. I won't deny it's a good-looking house to elope from, whatever you may think of living there, but I spare you architectural details. A page from 'Woodstock' will give you the sort of thing you want. Mrs. Ingestre's lap-dog, a vile little brute, had been silenced with a poisoned cracknel biscuit, the kind that has holes inside. We stole to the barouche—I saw to all the details—and with a wink to the assembled staff, all tipped beyond their wildest dreams, we mounted. When we were twenty minutes on our way, and the station lights at hand, V. said quietly that she had left her keys. I said I would do anything in the world for her but go back for them, since her guardian's bloodhounds were already on our trail. She didn't rise, she only looked at me and asked, still quietly, if I could pick a lock. I said I could pull one, and did. But she didn't rise to that, either; she seemed vexed in mind. She said her father always picked locks for her when she asked him,—she is always hurling her father at me. I shall hate that fellow soon. Later on, in the comparative security of our reserved compartment, she found her keys—in my pocket. But she was not really amused even then,—you Ashwins have no sense of humor.

"It took quite a time to restore her to a proper frame of mind—an elopee's frame, festive and badinacious. As if a key more or less could matter! Long before midnight we should be held up by a score of men in masks, the Ingestre colors on their sleeves, and we should lose all our property,

locked or otherwise, and escape narrowly, if at all, with our lives. I told V., to soothe her, that a shot would only reach her through my body: and she said she would accept a second-hand bullet rather than give up her pearls. The word 'second-hand' in such a connection struck me as both nasty and unscientific, because no bullet really could do it, as I proceeded to point out. The mention of the pearls, however, explained her late agitation, and though it saddened me in such a child, I made allowances. She simply wants to cut a dash at table-d'hôte, being tired of merely astonishing the Ingestres' butler.

"Thus our differences ended, Margery, and I took her to my heart. No, I didn't—no such luck. I took her hat off—no less than four pins—and she sat on my knee for half an hour, and lit her cigarette at my match. I made her come more than half-way for the light, because you can't think how pretty her eyes are when you see them close. She was not up to me that time, laying my proceeding to the draught or something, and I very nearly burnt my coat."

Lady Brading smiled over the latter sentences, and skipped them when she read the account to her husband. She perceived the situation, knowing both the actors in it intimately. Charles made a charming Bassanio, but Violet could not have followed Portia in her self-abandonment. She was still schooling her shy spirit to the new necessities. She had been hurried into matrimony, her delicate plumage ruffled very slightly, and needed leisure and equable conditions to smooth it down. Charles was too ardent—only a little, but still too much. Margery could see her, in fancy, setting a course for both, daintily and steadily, guarding the future, since Charles, she knew, could glorify the present alone.

Charles continued to glorify, in the absurd letter under his step-sister's hand. He still thought it extremely clever of him, evidently, to have conquered the brilliant Miss Ashwin, or at least to possess as much as he had con-

quered. He was quite ready to boast of it to all; and Margery, always a friend, and a recent bride herself, had most of his confidences.

"The gallant train held good," his account proceeded. "Though bandits and bloodhounds raged in her wake, our driver, spurring his mettled steed—steed of metal,—drew ahead, and distanced them. (Distance or out-distance? I forget.) Anyhow, I emptied the chambers of my revolver thrice from either window, which had its effect. V. woke up,—she was sleeping with her head on her jewel-case,—and asked if a tire had punctured. We entered the Duchy at dawn, and passing the frontier, I breathed again."

"They are in Cornwall," observed Margery to her husband at this point. "Charlie couldn't resist the alliteration when it came to the point."

"I dare say he'll give the rest away before he's done," said Robert. "I never knew anyone take such pains to keep secrets as Shovell, and succeed worse."

"There are pages yet," said Margery, turning them over. "He can't stop writing about her, once he begins."

"Oh well," said Robert thoughtfully, "that's no harm."

"We arrived," Charles proceeded, "travel-worn, but with the pearls intact, and all the pins in place. V. didn't trust me to dig them in again, I noticed. Do you trust Bob? We received a warm welcome at our destination (wherever it is). 'This,' I said to V., who was looking out of the lattice of our hostelry, 'is the chief fishing village of the Duchy; and those are the Duchy-men, walking about.'"

"St. Ives, probably," said Robert, taking his pipe out. "There are some good hotels there. Sorry, Margery,—go on."

"'And out there?' said V. inquiringly. 'Oh, that's the sea,' I said, with proper pride. 'We reached the coast, my child, and further than this, we need not go at present, though we must hold ourselves in readiness for what the

morrow may bring forth.' 'It is the morrow, isn't it?' said V., who seemed sleepy. 'I hope it will bring forth breakfast shortly, for your sake, Charles. It was really rather clever of you to hit on such a beautiful place.' I had not, but she is always civil, as you know. She asked if there were dispatches from England, quite in the proper style, and learning there were not, sank on the sofa, while I quaffed my coffee, and cut hunks from the haunch with my poniard. She lay there most of the morning, refusing all suggestions from me and others, and blinking at the Bay. I think night-journeys are a beastly institution, and called myself an ass, at intervals, all day long. She informed me more than once how kind I was, when I fetched her things: and she laughed twice at my jokes,—a sinister sign. But she would not admit she was fagged, and after dinner, in what I believe they call the gloaming, she went a walk with me along the beach. (I here omit a page of description. There was nothing really in sight but the sea and the shore, unless you count the sky; except some decent-looking rocks, where I shall bathe.) Luckily there was a stiff wind, so I could get my arm right round her without offense. She had to accept it, to stand up. Probably she shouldn't have tried to walk at all,—I rather wish that maid of the Ingestres' had come along, to manage her. That was my cursed selfishness again, because I barred the maid. You never get a moment's privacy with servants jumping out on you from every corner."

"Oh," said Margery. "Now I begin to see. It was his idea to move, not hers."

"Humph," said Robert, smoking. Robert also knew both the elements of this union, and in the quality of college comrade, he considered that he saw through Charles.

"It was a very nice walk," Charles continued jauntily, "in itself quite worth eloping for. Every known variety of sand can be observed on this shore, and is collected with ease in the pockets, or any part of the person, when the

wind blows. It flew out in clouds when V. brushed her hair to-night, and I shook a lot out of my eyebrows. To shave both in the Oriental manner seems to be the only remedy. We discovered a lighthouse on our return, and spent a long time at the window watching it, some hours, I should say; but the light came round, without the smallest hesitation, every time. A wonderful thing is science. V. said, *à propos* of the lighthouse's behavior, that she did admire impartiality. (I fine her sixpence for long words like that, a penny for every syllable.) I said I hated impartiality, particularly in women. That was one of the things she laughed at,—the other I am afraid I have forgotten. V. and I never agree, unless she is really seedy, as she was that beastly time in the spring; and even then she generally contradicted me with her eyes shut."

Quite at the end of the silly letter, Charles turned serious.

"I do wish she was well," he said; "not better, but well. Dr. Ashwin is a great nob, but he did not bring it off in his own household, and I've an idea conditions were against him. I believe her mother baited her to death those last weeks,—I wish I could get behind that woman. We had some pretty little scenes, the three of us,—four, rather, because Lady A. always lugs her husband in, but it was only towards the end I began to see how the land lay. If I ever find her ladyship saying things about me, Margery, there'll be a murder in the society papers. She hates Violet, and can't understand anyone liking her; I believe that's the long and short of it. Jolly domestic situation, I don't think. I am only thankful I have brought my girl off before she was completely done for."

That was the description of the new quarters and conditions supplied to Margery; other briefer ones to Charles' mother and Violet's father, during the days that followed, suggested that the pair were happy, and actively occupied. They occupied other people too. There was another newly-

married couple in the hotel, who shared the general interest with Violet and Charles, but, as they were the latest arrivals, the Shovells came in for a good deal. All the women—even the other bride—admitted he was frightfully good-looking; the men differed about her, the other bridegroom declaring her plain. Somebody asked Jones, being the Shovells' nearest neighbor, and owning the other end of their balcony, how they spent their time.

"Oh, they're always talking," said E. M. Jones.

"To one another, or to you?" said the inquirer, rather wickedly.

"I have spoken to them," said Jones. "I lent her my cycling-map one day, and she said a thing or two when she returned it."

"Pretty uppish, isn't she?" said a golfing-man.

"Oh well," said Jones, "I didn't notice it. She spoke like anybody else."

"Talked to him?" asked the usual father of a troublesome family.

"He's all right," said Jones. "Oh yes, we talked a bit."

"Cultivated, isn't he?" asked the pretty American girl.

"I dare say," said Jones. "He lent me a sheet of the 'Times.' They take it."

"What were you on, then?" his inquisitive neighbor pressed him. "Politics?"

"Cricket," said Jones; and walked off, leaving a disappointed circle. Mr. Jones was rather a secretive little man, the hotel ladies had agreed among themselves, and rather stupid. He invariably understood a question literally, and answered it simply, not to say shortly too. He had no idea of branching out, and being agreeable, at least on personal themes. The hotel ladies did not often touch on any others,—one does not, in holiday time. Jones was, to sum up the feminine opinion, rather disappointing, for he had the look of being easily managed, and was quite ready to be useful otherwise. The word "rather," it will be seen, qualified every epithet applied to Jones. He was

nothing in exaggeration, and the hotel ladies frequently forgot all about him, even when he was sitting in their midst.

As for the men, they liked him well enough. Every kind of man had a word for him willingly; and he was an excellent person to grumble to on a rainy day. "Harmless little beggar," was the way the men put it, "though a bit strait-laced." The latter capital term for Jones was discovered by Mr. Studley, the other bridegroom, when he was presenting the world with his views on womenkind one day. On this occasion there was nothing at all offensive in Jones' behavior, and he really said nothing, since he was reading; but Mr. Studley resented his fashion of reading, apparently, and found that name for him afterwards.

As soon as he had walked away from the representative assembly, who had questioned him about the Shovells, the assembly talked about Jones, as need not be said; and his late neighbor, vexed at being defrauded of details as to the young couple's private life, which Jones must have spied upon, and their private conversations, which he must have overheard, was rather spiteful.

"He admires her awfully, I believe," said Jones' neighbor. "He's always looking at her, anyhow; and she made him talk quite a lot last night, at dinner. He moved to that front room on purpose, I shouldn't be surprised. I wonder if the girl's a flirt."

"She doesn't dress like one," said the other bride, who was exhibiting her trousseau, and changing for every meal.

There was a violent discussion instantly; and such men as happened to be present left in haste. The exact social status of Mrs. Shovell vexed the popular mind a good deal. Even the question as to whether her pearls were real was not yet exhausted in the community; and her otherwise quiet and girlish style was generally considered to be out of keeping, both with the improbable pearls, and with her position as a two-weeks' bride.

II

The summary of his lively young neighbors by Jones was requited, as we have already hinted, by absolutely indefatigable analysis of Jones, from every point of view and at every opportunity, on the part of Mr. and Mrs. Charles. It was a wonderful and fortunate dispensation that, but two days after he first fell beneath their notice at table-d'hôte, he should be moved by the landlord to the adjacent room to theirs, suddenly vacated by one of the golfing gentlemen.

"If this were a detective story," said Charles to Violet, one early afternoon, during that drowsy period when most of the seaside world, after the effort of a morning bathe, is snoozing contentedly on beach or balcony,—"I should assume at once that Jones was after your pearls. His colorless manner is against him. Shall we assume it?"

"Certainly not," said Violet, who was engaged on a business letter, and being badly interrupted by Charles at intervals.

"Oh well," mused Charles, who was smoking in a comfortable chair, "we can afford to let it slide. Because I notice they have a different theory downstairs."

"Did you speak, dear?" said Mrs. Shovell after a silence.

"Yes, darling. I said I noticed they had a different theory to account for Jones' intrusion on our balcony downstairs."

"It's not all our balcony," said Violet, folding her letter; "so he can't intrude. At least, I don't regard it as mine."

"I shouldn't wonder if Jones wishes it was," said Charles. "That," he added hastily, "is the theory I referred to."

Violet tossed her letter on the table, pushed back her chair, and looked at him. "Charles, don't be a goose," she said, faintly coloring. "That's just the sort of gossip I hate worst. And, anyhow, you have no right to listen to it."

"I have the best right," said Charles gravely. "If any such things are said of you, I ought to know."

"It's not fair to him, either," argued Violet. "He struck me as a particularly nice young man,—really nice, I mean. It is probably because he holds apart from all those gossiping idlers that they attack him."

"I don't regard it as an attack," said Charles. "Granted it was true, I should consider it very natural on Jones' part. Besides, you were rather forward the other night at dinner, you know."

"Leave the subject," said Violet definitely. "You must be forward, or not talk at all, with a person like that; and as for the room, he asked to have it because, like everybody else, he enjoys the view. The sea-view," she appended, just in time.

"All right," said Charles. "And he got the room with the sea-view, because, unlike everybody else, he can afford to pay for it."

"Oh dear," said Mrs. Shovell, pained. "Isn't it terrible that things like that can be paid for?" She had risen and stood near him at the window, sweeping the blue bay with her gray eyes. "I wish you had not reminded me of it."

"As usual, you fail to take my point," said Charles, catching at her sleeve. "My point was——"

"That Jones has money," said Violet, eluding him. "I guessed that before. It is one of the things that makes him interesting."

"It's the only thing that makes him interesting in the eyes of the people downstairs," said Charles. "But I thought you were above all that." He looked at her with reproach.

"No," said Violet, considering it; "I think wealth is an element to be reckoned with, even psychologically——"

"Sixpence!" broke in Charles exultantly, and held out his hand.

Violet slapped the hand, and said her money was up-

stairs. Charles said he would let her off if she would come and tell him her whole theory of Jones.

Violet accepted the bargain so far as to sit on the arm of his chair, and allow him to tell her his whole theory, which was probably what he meant.

"I believe," said Charles darkly, "that this man is *the* Jones."

"Which?" said Violet.

"The one we all allude to when we use the term. Brown and Robinson probably exist as well, but I always pictured Jones as the most prominent. In other words, Jones is the man in the street. *Our* Jones is the man in the street. I have even proved it."

"How?" said Violet, leaning back amused, and consequently tractable.

"I asked him his opinion of the present Government," said Charles. "And Jones said, 'rotten.' Now, if he had said 'rotten at the core,' I should have taken him for a serious politician, of the opposite faction naturally, a profound thinker, an occasional lecturer on sociology, and generally speaking the sort of man I loathe. But when Jones said rotten, he meant rotten, proving himself to be the Jones I said. He called the Lancashire bowling rotten too, likewise the weather until we came, and the cookery at his last hotel, and the view from his other window. Do you see?"

"Perfectly," said Violet. "You needn't go on. I believe I could have guessed the word without annotation."

"I never know," said Charles, shutting his eyes, "if you are up to the full signification of the more ordinary vocables of our currency. Your own collection is unique."

"I am adding a quantity to it, every day," said Violet. "I believe I could talk like you at this moment; or like Mr. Jones' sister, if I had to. Shall I try?"

"Don't, for heaven's sake!" Mr. Shovell's eyes came open. "My dear girl, how you frightened me."

"Well, you were caricaturing me," said Violet. "Teas-

ing. I am not used to being teased about the way I speak. Father——”

“Drop it,” said Charles, getting a hand across her mouth,—which implies, of course, that the arm was already round her. “To proceed: having conjectured that he was *the* Jones, it became my object to discover his Christian name. It instantly becomes a question of absorbing interest. You admit that?”

Violet admitted, so far as he would let her.

“Do you think the E. or the M. is the one he uses at home?” said Charles.

“The M.,” said Violet, freeing herself. “Two of the envelopes we saw were addressed ‘M. Jones, Esquire,’ anyhow. And I can tell you what his name is *not*, Charles, and that’s Michael.”

“Why?” said Charles, interested in turn.

“Because Michael is the name of an up-to-date hero, and a woman’s favorite. And your Jones is neither.”

“My Jones would fain be,” suggested Charles. “All right,—he’s not Michael. Nor Maurice, I presume, for the same reason. Maximilian is a shade too warlike, so is Manfred; and Marius too classical. Miles——”

“Impossible,” said Violet. “Miles Jones! No mother could.”

“Well,” said Charles, “what sort of name could a mother? I leave it to you.”

Her faint color rose instantly. “I only mean you must think of the combination. Not a monosyllable, anyhow. Mortimer and Mordaunt both sound nice——”

“So does Melchisedec,” said Charles. “I believe we have exhausted the lot, and got no nearer. This work, my dear, every day, is almost too much for me. Shall I ask him? He’s out there on the balcony now.”

“Charles!” She sat up, one little hand clenched at her breast. “Why didn’t you tell me? Could he have heard?”

“Only the murmur of voices,” Charles consoled her. “Whispers from Elysium, and so on. And there stands

Jones, eating his lion-heart, alone. I'm sorry for that fellow. You might go and be nice to him, V."

"You can," said Violet, rising from her place at his side unexpectedly, so that he had really no time to prevent it. Her movements were all neat and swift, like a bird's. "I am going out, to register my letter. Is yours finished to Maud? Because if so, I will take it."

"It's about a quarter as long as Margery's," said Charles, looking at the sheet on the table discontentedly. (He had been supposed to be writing it, all this time.)

"I can never find so much to say to Maud. I wish Maud would get married, that would make it easier for a fellow."

"You must be very short of subjects," remarked Violet. "I wish I had written to dear Maud, but there's no time now. Put my love in, and fasten it up." She held it to him. "Here's a stamp."

"What do you bet," said Charles, licking all the corners of the stamp in turn, to punctuate his sentence, and to waste her time, "that I find out Jones' second name before I see you,—and his birthplace, club, favorite modern poet,—and the address of his tailor?"

"Do be quiet, Charles," she said gently. "You make me so nervous, when the windows are open. He can't help his tailor, probably."

"Sorry, darling," said Charles. "I was only gassing vacantly, as usual. My intentions are honorable to worthy Jones, as these results shall prove. Now cut along and get some air. Only just tell me where to pick you up when you have finished business,—I mean, when I have finished it."

Violet told him exactly where, and when, and left him in the hope he had been really attending to what she said. When he was looking at her simultaneously, she was never sure.

III

Mr. Shovell, an easy-going young gentleman, as the attentive reader may have guessed, spent a good hour smoking with Jones, each resting an elbow on the partition-rail of their common balcony. Starting from cricket, he found out a number of things—useful and the reverse. Then he wandered through the veranda, making himself irregularly agreeable, and found out a number more. Finally, he had a talk in the office with the proprietress, who, like most motherly women of her class, loved him on sight, and gave him details she would not have given to others. Then, bursting with information, and needing leisure to sort it, he strolled out in the direction of the place Violet had named, arrived there a good deal later than the time she said, and, not unnaturally, missed her. Consequently, after lounging about for a time, looking at other girls, and making comparisons, he found he was hungry, and was driven to return in his tracks to the hotel.

"Hullo!" said Charles, espying the form of Jones still on his second-floor balcony as he passed beneath. "Happen to know if my wife's up there?"

This highly characteristic accost, at the full pitch of his lungs, reached the entire rank of tea-drinking loungers in the veranda, who were considerably amused; and more than reached its object, whom it discomposed in proportion.

"Really, I don't know," his answer came back, amid a rustle of newspapers. "I think so." Mr. Jones, with a balustrade between him and the Shovells' balcony, could not be supposed to see inside the Shovells' room.

"All right," said Charles easily. "Don't fag." He stooped, chose a stone, and tossed it up at the half-opened window next to Jones'. Admirably well aimed, it disappeared within. Arousing by this means, however, no

response, not even the crash of broken glass or tea-cups, Charles was forced to assume either that Violet had not returned, or that she was in her bedroom, changing; and he strolled airily into the porch.

"Seen my wife?" he once more inquired, as he passed the group of men who generally sat, like an outpost, at the entry. Observing the pretty American girl among them, he removed his hat, and concentrated his inquiry upon her.

"Well," said the young lady at leisure, "I presume Mrs. Shovell's still inside that room, since she was outside it just lately, speaking to Mr. Jones."

Charles stopped short, and pausing, seemed to blush. "You don't say so," he said thoughtfully. Then he laughed of a sudden, sketched the young lady a salutation, and dashed upstairs.

"Isn't he fascinating?" remarked the girl to her surroundings. "As fresh! That's the way I'd like a man to be in love with me." Since at least six men were in hearing, this classed the American girl beyond redemption in the opinion of at least six spinster ladies. There were innumerable such ladies in that hotel, as it has not been necessary to insist.

"Surely you received my stone?" said Charles politely to Violet. She was inside the room, sure enough, reclining in a chair beside the tea-tray, and reading a letter with close attention. Her likeness to her clever father struck Charles forcibly when she was studious. She glanced up at his entrance, and laying the letter aside, handed him his tea-cup in one hand, and the stone in the other, mutely.

"Why didn't you come out and talk to us?" said Charles.

"I didn't want to move," she said lightly. "Lazy."

Charles took his tea, and three slices of bread and butter, carefully.

"That's right," he advised her. "Let me down easy,

—I can't stand much. Did it hit you or the looking-glass, darling?"

She shook her head. "I caught it," she explained.

"Jolly smart of you," said Charles, approving. As he subsided into his low chair he added—"It's what I thought I should do, but I haven't yet."

No response: Violet was smiling very slightly, though her eyes were diverted to her letter. After a pause, Charles put his tea-cup down, and drove his hands in his pockets.

"V.," he said, with solemnity. (This was the name on which he had finally resolved, after much fertile experiment.) "You will be glad to know that, since the late incident, Miss Hattie What's-her-name below there allows you are just too elegant to live."

"Are you sure?" said Violet. "It doesn't sound quite right."

"Well, that's the line."

"Poor Charles," said Violet, with a glance at him. "Did you feel snubbed?"

"I did. By Jones positively, and negatively by you. I carried it off extremely well," declared Charles. "Ask Miss H. if I didn't,—but the experience has left its mark. Don't you think it's the thing, V., to say you're sorry?"

"Don't you think it's the thing to stop satirizing me?" said Violet. "I can't help what I am." She spoke quickly: but almost immediately she got up, came behind his chair, and kissed him,—entirely of her own accord.

"You must put up with me for the present," she said, on a breath as light as the kiss, and would have withdrawn again, but he seized her.

"You little angel,—now, listen here. I apologize for my beastly manners, that's understood. And I'll keep that stone, and shy it at anyone who says a thing, harmless or otherwise, about you *or* Jones. I shy jolly straight, so they'll be sorry. Now tell me what you were worrying over, when I came in. My manners?"

"No," she said. "Your manners are unusually good,—I always thought so; so did Father."

"Is that letter from your father?" said Charles.

"No," said Violet; "from Mother."

He made a brusque movement, but she was still behind him, holding his head with her slight firm hands; so, after an instant, he took the hint and subsided.

"It's unheard-of, of course, that Mother should write," said Violet. "It's not her way. But I suppose our being in this part of the world was convenient. She says I am to go and see the Addenbrokes, at Torquay."

"Oh, curse!" said Mr. Shovell equably. "We can't."

"Not you," said Violet. "Mother does not suggest it. I am to go. It seems that the Addenbrokes are in hot water, as usual."

"More kith?" inquired Charles, subsiding still more under her expert handling. Violet never "pawed" people, but her touch was agreeable and suggestive.

"Very distant, but Mother's people are responsible for them. They are connected with the Ingestres on the mother's side,—like me. Are you bored with my kith, Charles?"

"I can stand hearing about 'em," said Charles thoughtfully.

"Well, you shall have a cigarette to carry you through." She picked his pockets and chose him one, while Charles finished his tea and looked on at the operation. "Mother's family is complicated," she explained, "because the Ingestres all marry, and mostly have large families, Mother herself being an exception. There!" She put the cigarette between his teeth, and lit it for him. "No, I shall not smoke till after dinner. Father says I must cut myself down,—or he will cut me off. Tiresome pedant, isn't he? He says I overdid it in the spring, when I never supposed he was noticing. Are you quite comfortable?—very well." She replaced her hands, and herself, where she had been before,—behind him and just out of sight. "The

Addenbrokes are a pair of orphan girls, one clever, and one pretty,—both rather fearfully so. Have you grasped that?"

"It's a good start," said Charles, smoking.

"They were not brought up at all," proceeded Violet, "by an extraordinary artist father, their mother being a negative quantity. Honoria and Felicia are their beautiful names,—all their father could do for them, because he did nothing else. He neither educated, nor earned for them, so far as I could ever discover. Both the parents were killed in a frightful train-smash nine years ago,—(Have I really not told you this?)—and after that the Ingestres had to bestir themselves. You know something of the Ingestres," said Violet, her eyes on her mother's letter, "so you know how much they object to that. They are lazy, huffy people; hard to move—in all senses. But Mr. Addenbroke mentioned Mother in his will,—I don't think she has ever forgiven him,—so finally, she supplied the money, and Cousin Agnes,—that's the sister of Mrs. Addenbroke, and of Mr. Ingestre at the Hall,—took charge of the girls. Have you got that straight?"

"I think I can do it," said Charles.

"Cousin Agnes got the worst of the bargain," observed Violet. "She has had nothing but trouble with them ever since."

"What kind of a party is she?" asked Charles.

"Cousin Agnes? She is a widow, pious and invalidish, living at Torquay. The Addenbroke girls live with her when they are not teaching. I think Honoria teaches still, that is: the other one does certainly. I am very, very sorry," said Violet dreamily, "for both their schools."

"But why should you be bothered about it?" said Charles, frowning. "That's what I can't see."

"Oh,—that's Mother. Cousin Agnes wrote to Mother, describing Felicia's latest, and wondering if Mother could do anything. Mother sends Cousin Agnes' letter on to me. That's Ingestre behavior all over. The only difference

between them is, Cousin Agnes thinks I might be some good, and Mother obviously does not. She does not conceal it from me."

"Then why bother you at all?" persisted Charles.

"To get rid of the letter." Violet laughed. "Mother hates such things lying about. And it's quite providential my being here, isn't it? So near, as she says. Mother's contempt for geography is quite splendid, and always was." She waited an instant. "I am *sorry* about it, Charles," she said, her finger-tips emphasizing her sorrow. "If I had thought of any such annoyance for you, I would have gone anywhere else. It's not as if I could do anything really,—only they think I can. Honoria thoroughly alarms the Ingestres,—she was a third Wrangler and goodness knows what at Cambridge,—before your day, she's twenty-nine. The only time I met her," said Violet thoughtfully, "she struck me as a stupid girl. I have no natural sympathy with mathematicians; that may be the reason."

"The reason may be, you're jolly clever and she's not," said Charles concisely. "All the Wranglers I ever met were asses, anyhow. Are the ructions with her, or with the younger one?"

"Both, probably," said Violet. "They are both terrors, in their ways. Honoria never has understood Felicia the least, or tried to. Perhaps she can't."

"What's Felicia?" said Charles. "How does she rile the Wrangler, I mean? Only by wrangling on her own? Pretty, did you say?"

"Pretty and silly," said Violet. "Violently silly,—it takes her in gusts. Mother thinks I had better not let you see Felicia, Charles."

"Does she say so?" Mr. Shovell awoke. "Give me the letter."

"No, I won't." Reaching a swift hand, she pushed the sheet further away before he could touch it. "I only wish *your* mother were here," she said, "to help me about this."

It looks to me as if the girl had really done it this time,—she has been near the edge pretty often,—but goodness knows. Cousin Agnes is prejudiced against them, of course, being religious, and it may not be as bad as it sounds.”

Once more she waited, as if to take breath, or thought: her fingers pressing him, and more than she knew.

“Have a cigarette,” said Charles helpfully, with an odd glance at her sidelong.

“No,—don’t tempt me.” She bit her lip. “I am strongly disinclined to intervene, you know. After all, both the Addenbrokes are older than I am. Felicia must be twenty-one. It is bound to appear impertinent to them, I mean, however convenient to their aunt. And Honoria in a real rage would not be amusing. She’s rather a—a rough diamond,” said Violet, having paused for a term.

“Meaning a wild beast,” said Charles serenely. “What’s the shindy about?”

“I can’t say exactly, dear,—it’s confidential. It looks wild, and worse, if I have got the facts right. But what with Cousin Agnes, and Mother, and both their temperaments to reckon with, I am not sure even of that.”

Charles took her hands from his brow of a sudden, rose, and stood at his full height above her.

“Don’t intervene, then,” he said shortly. “I forbid you to.”

“Do you really?” said Violet. The cloud slipped from her brow, and a gleam of amusement appeared. She caught at his coat. “Do you mean it, Charles?”

“Of course I do. I simply won’t have it. What business have they to fag you?—especially in a nasty business. Confounded cheek, all round, I call it. It’s my honeymoon as well as yours, isn’t it? Very well. Give me that letter, I’ll answer it.”

“Oh, no.” The girl took up the sheets hastily. “I mean,—I’m used to her. Really, Charles. Mother’s concise expressions—time-saving—are not always agreeable. She

is vexed, to begin with, at having to write. She can't bear writing, you know."

"Give it here," said Charles. "Thanks." He put it in his pocket. "I'll read it or not as I think fit. Anyhow, it's off your mind. You're to do nothing,—you can lay it on me if she says anything. I'll explain later if necessary, when we get back. Does Sir Claude know about it?"

"No. Please don't trouble him. Mother will be at him quite soon enough, if I fail her. That was one reason why I—why I debated. I do feel for Mother," said Violet, hesitating. "In a way, she's responsible for those girls. The will made her morally responsible. I know that from Father himself."

"I hope she feels her moral responsibilities a bit more than towards her own daughter," thought Charles rather grimly. "If not, I am sorry for the Addenbrokes."

He felt thoroughly vicious towards the letter,—he thought he had at last got rid of Lady Ashwin. He was ready enough to admire her, in her own place; but she had been a little too much in the foreground, in Mr. Shovell's view, during the period of his engagement, and his civility had been taxed to dispose of her gracefully, once or twice. He particularly resented her invariable cool assumption, in life, concerning Violet's services; the more so, naturally, since the date when his own claim upon those services began. Lady Ashwin was a woman who used others mercilessly, by the simple means of refraining from all effort on her own part, and letting her obligations slide. She was doubtless now coming to realize, with surprise and indignation, the manifold uses of an only daughter; having got the daughter off her hands, to use the popular term, with the greatest dispatch that was decent, and with the frankest indifference to her deserts, filial and otherwise: even her claim to such interest as a clever servant of the household might have asked: for such, as a fact, Violet had been. Charles now perceived that Lady Ashwin did not intend to slacken her grasp on those good offices,

however she might underrate her daughter's talents in other directions; and he cursed the intruding letter the more.

"Don't worry, darling," he said gently, after some moments of silence had passed. "I can't bear it."

"Oh, you are nice," said the girl under her breath, as she swerved from him. Still concealing her face, she walked away towards the window, and stood there for some time, her hands clenched at her side.

Charles, after one regretful glance in her wake, decided at his leisure to let her be. He abandoned, also at leisure, the idea of attempting to divert her with his own scraps of gossip, so carefully saved and sorted. There is a season for all things, thought Charles; and this was not the moment for Jones' second chapter, thrilling to all right-thinking investigators though it might be. He put it off until such time as Violet should be ready to play with him again. Nor was he obsessed by the desire to tease her for her confidence, at this stage of affairs; especially about her own matters, the peculiarly trying family situation she had had to face almost from childhood, and managed quite adequately without his aid. At least Charles judged he could do no further good by interfering for the present, and he did not interfere. He took up a small net he used for dredging on the beach, and proceeded to mend it with materials abstracted from Violet's work-basket, whistling contentedly the while.

The owner of the work-basket did not look at him, though she was aware of his depredations. He was not absent from her consciousness for a moment, intent on her latest problem as she was. Violet had lived much alone, and even this daily companionship was strange to her a little. She was discovering the resource it offered her, by degrees. The full expression of these discoveries was reticent, even to herself. He was "nice," Charles,—and he was there. He made a second in her inner life, as well as her outer, and her swift-weaving thoughts occa-

sionally embraced him, worked him into the pattern of the future that was spreading before her, during these quiet weeks. She had got so far as to accept him completely, mentally at least. In life, audacious and mischievous, distracting,—devouring at times,—he was still able to startle her. Once or twice, during her meditations at the window, Violet smiled suddenly, thinking of Charles, certain of his late proceedings, and of his latest one, in the calm abstraction of her letter. It was like him, the pleasant assurance of it,—surprising her. Then, her mind recurring to the letter's contents, her face turned serious again. The contents were concerned with things and people that, even in these strangely-illuminated first weeks of wedlock, she could not, should not, forget. It was safer not to forget them. The ocean her eyes were watching had a melancholy little note, for all the wide glory of its appearance. It was better also in the glorious tide,—the rising tide,—of life and love, not to lose hold of that underlying tragedy, completely.

Charles, urged in part by the need to try his net, so admirably mended by unaided masculine contrivance behind Violet's back, took a solitary stroll before dinner. While he was out, he made up his mind on the question of conjugal morality, and read Lady Ashwin's short letter to her daughter through. Violet risked that deliberately when she gave it him, and he took his own risks in the matter. The enclosure, which bore a black border, and was conspicuously marked "private," he avoided; for the affairs of the orphan Addenbrokes were certainly none of his.

The note he read gave Charles one of the sharpest shocks of his life. He had always charged his own mother's style with dryness, if not severity; but what he held was not a mother's letter at all. There was no sign in it of confidence, or of kindness. The expressions were those of a cool equal, and hostile critic. Rival, Charles would have said, had his modesty ventured on the term. The "dear"

at the beginning, the "affectionate" at the end, seemed but an additional insult to his mind, as soon as he had grasped the true bearing of the rest. The sentences that referred to himself made him bristle, though each taken alone sounded inoffensive. He could almost hear the writer's deliberate voice pronouncing them.

"There is no point in Charles' going, especially as Agnes implies the girl is still about. She is that sort of girl—upsetting—unless she has changed a good deal. And if she has got her own idea, she had better stick to it. She will be a good riddance to Agnes, anyhow. . . . So far as that goes, C. will be better let alone now and then. Your talk is like your father's, comes from nerves. It sounds clever for a time, but they soon notice the difference. Once show you are nervous about them, your hold slips. It's never a grip after, only clutching. . . . You are not given to taking advice, but don't say later I did not mention it."

"And she lets me read this!" he thought, with a thrill of real pride. His next thought to that was—"But how the woman dares!—a girl like that, worth six of her!"

He felt the virulence of jealousy vaguely, but would not admit it, for very shame. Another woman would have recognized it at once, for only that passion can spur a pen to such wounding phrases. It mattered little of what the jealousy might be,—of youth, of happiness, of Charles' own free bearing and facile attractions; to the truly sensual and self-absorbed the commonest possessions of others may inspire it. But Charles, wrapped at this time in the study of one woman, gave little thought to Eveleen's impulses, beyond their immediate effect on Violet. Remembering the girl's tone and aspect lately, her deliberate concealment of her face from him, and the touch, still on his temples, of her nervous hands, he did half see how far such a mother as this would be capable of tormenting her, if she would, in married life. For ten minutes at

least after reading, it has to be confessed, the sweet-tempered Charles was in a black rage. Finding a convenient spot on the quays, where he could write in peace, he composed and indited a letter to Lady Ashwin, hardly longer than her own, entirely for his own consolation and relief. Then deliberately, though regretfully, he tore it up, and threw the fragments in the sea.

After this little effort, he resumed his place on the seawall, and wrote another,—balmy in tone, as amusing as he could make it, and as flattering as he judged Lady Ashwin would stand. At the close he mentioned casually that he was not sure if she realized how far it was to Torquay by rail, and that they had no motor handy for the moment; but he would take Violet over, if it could be reasonably managed, before they left. Otherwise, he feared his wife's advice on the case her mother laid before her (Charles enjoyed that phrase) must be sent through the post. Indeed, that might be the best solution. Violet had not given him the facts, so he could not judge how unpleasant the affair was; but if it was unpleasant, after all, such an unpracticed girl could be of little use. And Violet's mother at least would understand, he did not want, in their short holiday, to lose more minutes than he absolutely must of her society.

He showed this composition after dinner to Violet, who read it biting her lip, called it "quite beautiful," and then coming back to his side on the hearth,—for she had been using the last light at the window to read,—inquired if she might have the honor of tearing it up. Charles, after a little so-called argument, which on his side was shameless flirting, allowed her to do so: and she scattered the pieces over the fire.

"A great waste of your precious time, isn't it?" she said in her soft mechanical tone, as she stood warming her hands at the blaze they made; for the evening had turned chill while Charles was out, and she had had a wood fire to

welcome his return. It gave them a pleasant foretaste, amusing in June, of what the winter evenings together would be. "But a bit of true art is never wasted," she added dreamily. "Somebody says so,—I forget who."

"You don't," retorted Charles. "I wish you wouldn't tell lies about nothing, Violet. I quote poetry myself now and then, when necessary. It brightens up the dialogue. I quoted in that letter,—unpracticed girl is Shakespeare, a trifle adapted. And you can't deny it's on the spot."

"I don't deny it," said Violet, looking down at the subsiding flames with a sweet sobriety Portia's self could hardly have exceeded.

"And talking of art," Charles pursued, watching her between his narrowed eyelids, "you should have seen the other."

"The other?" She half turned to him.

"The other letter I wrote your mater this afternoon."

"Charles, you wretch!" She dropped on her knees before him, clasping his. "You have not sent one really?"

"No, my precious,—take it easy. But it was a jewel of style. It simply scorched my fingers when I tore it up. It would have been waste of coal to burn it,—so I cooled it in the sea."

Still kneeling, she pondered the phrases an instant, looking down. There was barely light enough for him to see her, for the fire had died again, and they had not sought a lamp. The summer twilight and she matched perfectly,—it was in such twilight he had seen her first, three years ago, the three that had made their history.

"Were you angry?" she said at last, lifting her eyes.

His encountered them. There ensued one of the prolonged pauses between intimates, in which the unspeakable is said.

"I am thinking," said Charles quietly at the end of it, "of asking Marmaduke Jones to join our walk to-morrow. He's quite a nice fellow, and seems lonely;—unless you object, my dear."

It may amuse those who are not lovers to supply,—for the benefit of those who never even wanted to be,—the intervening steps between the final question and answer in this carefully-noted dialogue.

IV

Marmaduke, as a fact, was Jones' name. Charles supplied the fact, with various other facts and ornamental surmises, to Violet, the next morning, before they took their walk. He detained her to discuss it, with difficulty, for she was on springs to be up and about the world. It was a glorious morning, seeming to promise a spell of settled weather, and everybody was stirring in the little town. It was as well, Charles explained, with that weighty solemnity which always implied an agreement of nonsense between them, for his wife to be posted in advance, in case they encountered E. M. Jones upon the beach. The name was undoubtedly Marmaduke, and he was so little ashamed of it that he had it printed on his card. Charles thought it probable that Jones' sister, if he had one, shortened it. He was anxious to know what the name of Marmaduke, apart from all other less important considerations, suggested to Violet.

"It's rather sweet," said Mrs. Shovell, who was looking extraordinarily young and pretty, and was rather erratic in dialogue. "Lavender and things,—not poudré precisely, but curls and hoops. He must have a nice mother."

He might *have* had, Charles explained, but she no longer existed. Jones' father was also defunct. He was that pathetic thing, an orphan. Charles was sure, at least, Violet perceived Jones' pathetic side. He was the kind of man who walked lonely amid crowds.

"Then he cannot be the man in the street," said Violet. "Be reasonable, Charles. The man in the street is certainly gregarious,—no, that's only four syllables, and it is exactly what I mean. You must give up one theory or the other."

Charles, on consideration, preferred to keep the pathos. The pathos was evident, indeed, since Jones, for instance, knew no one in this hotel.

"I heard him say good morning six times," said Violet, "when he went out early to bathe. I counted as I lay in bed. Everybody bathed this morning except you."

"That does not prove that he's popular,—merely polite," reasoned Charles. "Marmaduke is polite. He told me nearly half the things I tried to find out without apparent resentment. After the first few minutes, Jones goes in harness steadily. I shall learn to manage him in time. The man's a mystery," mused Charles.

"No," said Violet, with a shake of head, "I assure you that theory is exploded too. Jones is not after my pearls. He has stopped being a mystery, and become a dear. I found out he was a dear, before you came in, yesterday afternoon."

"Did you?" Charles pondered, eyeing her. "Well, it may all fit in. At this point, V., you take a seat, and ask me for my narrative."

"Mayn't I walk about?" said Violet. "All right." She sat down, and leant back.

"You must listen, you know," said Charles suspiciously. "It's not the thing to shut your eyes. Yes, do, darling, if you're tired."

"I am not tired, only patient," explained Violet. "It's a delicious day."

"You needn't be patient long," said Charles. "Only just wait till I spring a bomb on you,—a mine, I mean. Jones is a University man."

"Oh, surely not!" said Violet, her gray eyes opening wide.

"I thought it would move you. Now say he's not a mystery. Jones was a Tosher."

"A what?"

"Oho! Who lightly calls herself Oxford, and attempts to bandy words with fellows from the other shop? Even I

know what a Tosher is. Tosher is Oxford dialect for 'unattached.' "

"Unattached," repeated Violet, considering it. "Well, yes; that is rather pathetic, certainly."

"Don't find pathos in the wrong places," advised Charles. "I can't bear sentimentality. 'Unattached' means no more than that Jones was a free lance in his studies, and belonged to no official college. It also implies that, at the time, funds were low. It makes a faint reflection on his religious opinions, but nothing serious. Jones remains, in spite of all, respectable. I have often thought of lecturing on life in Oxford," said Charles, "the people who lay claim to that old place seem to know so little about it."

"Well, we were attached," said Violet. "And what's more, you must be wrong about religious opinions, because ours were awful. And what's more than that, we raked in University prizes, and took a First Class at an age when most men go up. We then proceeded to the business of life in Paris, to the indignation of our classical professors, who never forgave us. I know because I have talked to one at dinner. *Have* you ever seen Father's medals, Charles? Do remind me to show you some time,—it's too silly."

Charles waited for her, his withering eyes resting upon her countenance. It held a light which Jones, at least at present, could not evoke. It was useless to try to stop her, when launched at this speed, so he waited, wearily.

"Quite done?" he said in the pause.

"Yes; go on narrating, dear. What did Mr. Jones read?"

"I have no idea," said Charles. "What a thoroughly stupid question, excuse me, Violet. It puts me out. As if a man's subject matters! You'll be talking to Jones himself about it next. The question is, what a man adds to the experience of life. I learnt a great deal myself, and so did Jones. We shook our heads over it, yesterday.

Parcel of young blackguards we were, my faith! Well, what are you shaking yours about?"

"He was never a blackguard," said Violet. "He has not the physique, or the nerve for it. He could not take a policeman's helmet if he tried. He worked peaceably at whatever it was, in well-recommended rooms looking over the High—no, the Turl, since funds were low at the time. How delightful and spirited of Mrs. Jones to send him to Oxford! I am sure his excellent father, in an old-fashioned country business, disapproved."

Mr. Shovell was waiting perforce again, but this time not in scorn; rather ruffled on the contrary.

"How do you know all that?" he demanded. "Were you fishing yesterday too?"

"Surmise," said Violet lightly. "What are the facts?"

"His father managed a small bank in a provincial town in Wales. He wanted Marmaduke to succeed him, but his mother thought Marmie was fit for better things. Duke was an exceptionally good boy——"

"Theology!" cried Violet. "That's what he read, then."

"No, he did not," said Charles. "I implied clearly that at least one of the parents was unorthodox, if you had listened. You go off with ideas——"

"Well, I merely imply that Jones has an open mind. I think that highly probable. He would read theology to see which of his parents was right."

"Disgusting," said Charles. "Whatever he isn't, Jones is a dutiful son. Dutifulness, as a general virtue, simply trickles from him."

"Well, I did not imply he was undutiful; merely open-minded."

"What's the difference?" said Charles. "A jolly time you must have given your parents, V., if that's your idea of duty. Unquestioning obedience was Jones' line——"

"To which parent?" said Violet.

"Both! Alternately! Now will you let me speak?"

Where the money came from, and how much there is, is one of the things I have yet to discover. But it is certainly there. Shall we keep that before us as our object of investigation for the day?"

"Do as you like," said Violet, "but don't drag me in. I shall talk to Mr. Jones about the weather."

And so she did.

When unsuspecting Jones espied the couple, and removed his hat, she accosted him so sweetly on this subject, that he was lured at once to follow them. Having thus attached him, she enlarged upon the weather at her ease. Jones talked about it too; it would have seemed to be his favorite study. Charles attended to Violet's feminine efforts with contempt, and putted a pebble along the beach with his stick the while, for miles: or at least it seemed miles to Charles, who concentrated most of his magnificent mind on the effort of sticking to one stone,—and effort was required, since there were millions to choose from. As he set the course for the party, and the course followed the stone, it was naturally a rather irregular progression; but all parties seemed to be enjoying it greatly, at least at first. Whenever Charles gave the other two his attention, they were still upon the weather, or at least some subject closely akin. Mrs. Shovell, in an exclamatory and idle mood, remarked on her surroundings, and got no further at all. Charles grew rather ashamed of Violet, who was showing herself so commonplace in Jones' eyes. She was really rather a clever girl, or had been supposed to be when Charles married her. Her husband could generally trust her to sustain his credit for wit in mixed company; and when mixing with Jones, for all the poor fellow's natural unfitness to support her, he had thought she might do better than this.

"Pretty clouds," said Violet, waiting for Charles, who had lost his stone. "But they look like wind. Another windy night—how hateful. I never mind the sea talking

all alone in the night, do you?—Look at that sea-gull balancing,—isn't he showing off? I want to duck him under when he does that,—just for a lesson, once. But I dare say he'd only laugh and shake his wings. . . . Don't you simply ache to travel, Mr. Jones?"

That was a trifle better, thought Charles, though she might have led up to it more dexterously. Anything so amateurish he never heard. He found his stone, or one exactly like it, and drove it splendidly, and almost straight ahead. This pleased him, and, shouldering his stick, he turned towards the others.

"I want to go to Paris," said Jones, in his uninteresting voice.

"How nice," said Violet. "Soon?—Are we to come on, dear? Very well."

"I hope to go soon. I have always wanted to."

"I have places like that too," said Violet. "I used to hug them. But in the case of most of mine, I don't suppose I ever shall—now," she appended dreamily, gazing at the sea.

Charles, overhearing, thought she might manage to keep Jones going, even in her futile feminine way, without administering backhanders by the way to him. It was not his fault if he had deranged her maiden dreams of exploration by marrying her. It was her fault for entertaining such unwomanly ambitions. He opened his mouth, as they came alongside, to make a satirical comment. But his mouth remained open; for Jones said—"I never thought I should. I've no notion of those cheap tours, thanks. That's what I always said to myself, you know. Sooner nothing at all than that. But now——"

His tone was lower than Charles had heard it, and caught at the end by a kind of gulp. His head was hanging down, and he trailed his stick,—a far from heroic attitude.

"But now you can," said Violet, her own tone soft in sympathy. "Yes, that's the best of it, when really exquisite things take you by surprise. We ruin our experience

by foresight, don't we? Absolutely ruin it. Women are worse than men." She withdrew her gray eyes from the horizon, and they looked at Marmaduke kindly, for all the haze that still lingered. "When are you going?" she asked. "October's the best month. Wait till a fortnight before—about the twentieth, and then send a card to Cook's."

"I'd thought of doing that," said Jones eagerly. "I'd—I'd like to do it in style, you know: no nonsense."

"That's right," Violet encouraged him. "Oh, don't I wish I were you! Paris for the first time,—delicious! And alone!"

When she had quite done insulting him, Charles thought, he would make a really biting remark, and startle her. He prepared one, putting his stone viciously. But, unluckily, he hit the wrong one,—more than half imbedded,—hurt his hand, and cracked his stick.

"Charles!" said Violet. "In your wife's presence,—is that Cambridge form? I shall take the stones away from you, if you can't play nicely.—You do propose to go alone?" She turned to Jones.

He nodded. "Part of the fun. I'd find out alone, anyhow. Later on, of course, you might take somebody."

"I see you have worked it out," said Violet. "I shall not advise you at all,—a word would shatter it. I am afraid *your* sea-gull is greedy, Mr. Jones. His intentions are not so graceful as they seem. Look at them squabbling,—oh!—Will you write your adventures down?"

"Oh, just notes," said Jones awkwardly. "Not a whole jagged journal. I hate that rot."

"Don't!" cried Mrs. Shovell. "That's what I did. Never mind. It was unmitigated gush,—what Charles calls gas,—unfit for human eyes the days I really enjoyed myself. We had lovely weather, I remember,—rather like this."

Did she intend to hark back to that again, thought Charles. She was really hopeless this morning. He would

have to take his narrative in hand himself before long if she did not get on faster.

"But you weren't *alone* there?" suggested Marmaduke, rather grave.

"Would that I had been!—no. I lost myself twice, though,—quite successfully. But Father always found me again too soon. That's the worst of him. . . . I was eleven," she added, after a short pause.

"Did he smack you?" said Charles, who was cross. He had to walk with them now, and Jones did not offer to lend his stick. He did not appear to think of Charles' needs at all.

"No, dear; Father was too modern, even then. He only looked thoroughly tired of me, and tipped the policemen. I shouldn't wonder, thinking it over now, if Father had cherished sweet dreams of being alone in Paris,—that time. He would have agreed with Mr. Jones. I am certain you are right about it," she addressed him suddenly. "It is the only way,—strange though it may feel at first."

"It'll be queer," Jones admitted. "Going off on the spree like that,—especially now. I'm not half sure she'd have liked it."

"Your mother?" said Violet.

"Father's sister,—her that left me the money. She was a bit stiff in her ideas."

"You are not to have moral scruples," said Violet, with sudden intensity. "I can't bear it. Follow your star, Mr. Jones. Plunge smiling. Sin, if you really must, with a good grace. Courage, camarades, le diable est mort. Et tout ce qui s'ensuit," she concluded.

"Who's swearing now?" demanded Charles. "You're shocking Mr. Jones,—no wonder!"

"Will you say it again?" said Jones rather eagerly.

"No." She laughed. "Better not. Don't you talk French?"

"Oh, not to call *talking*." He looked dubious. "I suppose one'd write in French for the rooms?"

"Father did," said Violet thoughtfully. "They like it better, naturally; but there's no need."

"Oh, I can write," said Jones, "if it comes to that. Better to do the thing in style. I'm not up to speaking much yet, but I can write."

"Dear, I'm tired," said Violet, suddenly clasping Charles' arm. "I can't get as far as the point to-day. I think I shall wait for you here."

Without pausing for permission, she sat down on a nice rock, where there was exactly room for two, looking piteous. Charles' blue eyes shot lightnings at her, quite uselessly. Violet could appear exhausted at any moment, whether she were so or not, and now she did. She drooped on her rock, a charming and pathetic little object. Her charms to-day gave Charles shocks continually, though he sought to make headway against such an obviously unfair advantage.

"Perhaps you would like to go home," he said ominously. "Jones and I——"

"Oh yes," said Violet. "The rocks are so slippery. And I have not got tennis-shoes."

No more, it may be mentioned, had Mr. Jones. While Charles preserved a dignified silence, Jones stood where he was, close at Mrs. Shovell's side while she was speaking, and glancing anxiously up and down the empty spaces of the shore. Then he looked at his watch.

"Short of time?" Charles suggested. "Perhaps after all, then, we had better all go back. We've come farther than I thought, and it's slow going on this——"

Jones interrupted, and interruption, of whatever nature, in that quarter was so remarkable that, for all his quiet voice in speaking, Charles stopped short.

"I could go back," he said, addressing Charles, "and bring my car as far as the turn up there,—if you could get her up the path."

"A *car*!" ejaculated the youth. "Have you *got* one?"

"Oh yes, at the hotel. I haven't used it since I came. I

thought perhaps——” He looked at Violet on the rock.

“I never heard anything so kind,” she cried with emphasis. “Did you, Charles? But I couldn’t, you know, possibly.”

“Couldn’t get up the path?” said Charles. His sarcasm was profound.

“Couldn’t be such a nuisance. Couldn’t ever respect myself again. My husband is ashamed of me as it is. Go on with him, dear, do you mind? I shall rest, and wander home.”

This right-about-face in strategy, as he regarded it, so flabbergasted Charles, that, before he knew it, he had obeyed her directions, and was walking on with their new acquaintance along the shore.

“She doesn’t look strong,” ventured Marmaduke Jones presently, when the pair had left the rock behind. He spoke very modestly indeed, and certainly, Mr. Shovell appeared sulky. The fact was, a horrid doubt had attacked Charles’ mind, on abandoning Violet, that she had not been acting, and was really tired—or worse. The Ashwins acted so well, whichever way round it chanced to be, that there was no being certain of the fact, whichever it was. They were exasperating people.

“She isn’t awfully,” he replied shortly. “Nothing wrong with her, though.”

“Her father’s a big doctor, isn’t he?” said Jones.

“Er—yes,” said Charles. He was almost incapable of speech. Did he hear aright? Had this Jones, on whom they had spent so much tireless curiosity, been retaliating upon them,—spying too? Incredibly audacious Jones! He waited, breathless, for developments.

“It doesn’t always *help* much,” murmured Jones, turning over the medical question.

“Apt to be slack with their own broods, you mean,” said Charles, quite mechanically. “I say—do you mind my asking—how you know?”

“Ashwin? Heard the name,” Jones enlightened him.

"He's one of the johnnies who boss my show: patronage committee,—but he does more than patronize. I'm secretary for them this year,—they seemed to want somebody, so I wrote. I'm out of a job, you see,—glad enough to do anything where it's any use. They were glad enough to have me as it happened. Those voluntary-aided affairs go up and down, and they can't give much salary. Not that I want any," he added shyly, "but I took it for the form."

"Charity?" said Charles, with the vagueness of his kind. He received an explanation, which left him little the wiser. Jones' "show" appeared to be one of the innumerable movements for the relief of certain of the more obscure, offensive evils of our vast community, constantly launched like waves by the vigorous impulsion of a few determined minds, to sink again when the public flow of interest in a sensational novelty has subsided. Jones had volunteered in the ebbing period, he gathered, and continued to strive against odds for the welfare of his cause. It was the kind of thing rich, piously-nurtured, insignificant Joneses did.

"But I don't quite see," said Charles, recurring to his most artless vein, "how it helps; to know my wife was Ashwin's daughter, I mean. She has changed her name."

"Oh, that," said Jones. "You couldn't know, of course. They are all on to that since yesterday. That cross-faced girl—Purvis—found the notice in one of the picture papers. They've stacks of 'em, always turning 'em over, in the reading-room. If I'd thought you minded, I'd have carried it off."

"Notice? Of the wedding, do you mean?"

"Yes. Only a little bit about it, but enough. Enough for me, I mean. Ashwin, and Claude,—not likely there should be two. They've been hunting for days," said Jones indifferently.

"Confounded cheek," said the bridegroom. "None of their business, anyhow."

"Nothing much else to do," said Jones tolerantly. "Those girls."

"Precious civil of you to call them girls," observed Charles. "Hardly in their first bloom, are they?"

"Oh well," said Jones. "They're not ladies. What are you to say?"

Since Charles laughed, he looked at him. He was a diffident fellow, this Jones, but not ill-looking. His ordinary eyes showed a glint of jocularly, as though to answer Charles, though they protested at his laughter too.

"Anyone knows a lady when they see one," he persisted. "Any fool. Those girls aren't;—too noisy by half. What's a fellow to say? Come now." Stopping, he challenged his companion.

"It depends on whether a fellow expects to be overheard," said Charles.

"That's good," said Jones instantly. "But they always hear. They hear everything that's going, and repeat it."

"Call them pitchers, then," said Charles frivolously. "Or parrots."

"Oh yes,—only you don't like to call names. There are lots of them, all over the shop, that sort." Jones, having swept the horizon, as though reviewing endless ranks of mature girls that no fellow could call ladies, turned round. "I say,—she's gone," he remarked irrelevantly.

It was a fact that the wide bay, with its sweep of sand, and its rock in the middle distance, were alike innocent of Violet. Near or far, she was not seen. She must have adopted the cliff path, and almost immediately after their departure. Her elvish caprices baffled the wit of sober man to follow, and sober man, in the person of her husband, gave up the effort. Having searched the landscape for her in vain, its total emptiness inspired Violet's husband to a bright idea, and, swinging about, he proposed to Marmaduke Jones to bathe.

"Now, look here," said Charles, when, greatly restored

in temper and spirits by a lengthy swim, he reached home in his turn, "I don't like these games. You don't play fair."

"I don't want to play," said Violet, whom he found in the depths of her bedroom, at bay, as it were, upon the window-seat, looking desperate, not to say guilty. "I told you so. I don't really care for the game."

This was becoming serious. Charles took a seat on the bed, facing her. "You don't mean to say you're *tired* of Jones," he said reproachfully. "You *can't* be."

"Not a bit," she reassured him. "Not a scrap at present. It isn't that. It isn't that I mind playing in the abstract,—I love it. It was lovely when he was downstairs, and on the balcony, and second-hand through your mind,—which never spoils things, Charles, on the way. Lovely investigating, I mean. But walking all together in that friendly way, with those exquisite shades across the sand, and the sea-gulls toppling on the little waves,—too unbearably white against the blue,—it's different. The point of view is different. It's my silly mind."

"I never knew such a girl," said Charles. "Wherever will you get to next? Go on." He watched her, with admiration not unmingled with suspicion.

"I can't," said Violet, swerving yet more from his eyes. "It's perfectly useless explaining, unless you see. Have you really never noticed how drivelling I turn on days when there's lots of color about? I ought to have warned you,—they're used to it at home. It goes to my head, I can't help it. To-day it was worse than usual. I don't know why." She bit her lip. "I have not the least idea, really, what I talked about to Mr. Jones. I thought if it got too senseless, you'd step in. But you only played with the stones, so I had to."

"Do you mean it?" said Charles. "Word of honor?"

"Word of honor, dear. He was nice about Paris, wasn't he?" She swept her brow with her hand. "I'll try and make it up to him to-night."

"Well," said Charles, with deliberation, after a pause, "if you mean you were really *drunk*, it was not a bad show, considering."

"Drunk,—yes, I was. How clever of you! I'm still feeling it."

"Was that why you sat down?" said suspicious Charles.

"Yes, probably. Because of that. It's a great pity for you," said Violet with fervor, "you have married such a fool."

"Perhaps that's really why you put me off so long," said Charles. "Oh well, I'll make a note of it. We'll try to struggle on. We're in for a week of this weather, that's the worst." His blue eyes rested on the sky without the window, more blue than they. "What do you want me to think of you trying to keep Marmaduke, and sending me on alone?"

"I thought he would rather, perhaps. He seemed to be happy talking. Oh dear,—were you jealous of that? Didn't you mean me to talk to him? You said he was lonely,—I was trying to be nice."

Charles answered nothing. She was really quite beyond him for the moment, though more charming every instant as she grew more distracted, more evidently shy of him, and frightened of herself. He was still desperately jealous of something, whatever this spirit was that had clutched her,—but it was not of Jones. He was pretty sure it was not Jones. Violet's head was in her hands, her dark hair dropping across her fingers in mossy streaks. Her delicate fingers were slightly embrowned by the sun, the last joint whitened where they pressed against her brow. He noted such details, being so very near, while he whistled soundlessly, considering in all quarters of his masculine mind, her case.

"You are an extraordinary girl, V.," he said at last. "It's certainly risky letting respectable young fellows like that take walks with you."

"Why risky? He's nice,—I really like him. He is far the nicest person in the hotel, I am sure. I think his fixed idea to conquer Paris, without the cheapening effect of his fellow-creatures, is charming. Most characteristic probably,—I'm sure it fits in somewhere. To the narrative, I mean. Won't you go away and fit it in for me, among the other things? I make you a present of it willingly. If it should supply a blank, our walk will not be wasted."

"You want me to go away?" said Charles. His pained astonishment rose by leaps and bounds, as it became evident that she wanted it. Pain showed in his eyes as he sat, gazing at Violet, upon the bed. Then, though her face was still hidden from him, light arrived.

"Are you happy, darling?" he said suddenly.

"Yes. Frightfully! That's what's the matter with me, really. I am glad you have found it out. I am not—used to it." She just got the last words out, with a strong effort, though they were barely heard.

Charles sat a little longer, thinking things out. They came clearer. Presently they became quite clear, and he rose and departed quietly, since she wished to be alone. He walked into their sea-front sitting-room, where lunch was spread; and from the window where he stood, in the new light that seemed to have altered the light of day, saw Marmaduke Jones' back. He was standing as usual on his balcony, looking abroad at land and sea,—as usual, alone. Charles felt sorry for Jones, still suffering doubtless from the effects of his late walk with a drunken lady. (She certainly remained a lady, even when drunk, the comical fellow was right.) Charles was *quite* sorry for Jones. And if any would-be sympathizer with the woes of humankind supposes that state of mind to be depressing in a bridegroom, or needing to be compassionated, they must submit to instant disillusion at the hands of his biographer. For the broad effect of his deep sympathy for a fellow-creature on Charles' spirit, was that of a nameless, soaring, really insufferable content.

II

LISETTE

I

AFTER that, for a period, indeed until quite the end of the Shovells' stated holiday, there was little to record. When the barometer stands at "set fair," without and within, for body and spirit alike, recorders in general lay down their pens, or at least, are wiser to do so. They need not turn their minds away, for sunshine and happiness are worth considering, among the elements of life, and should, for all the pessimists' conspicuously clanking fetters, be so considered at times. To some natures, at least, happiness is the swiftest teacher and the surest guide. Misfortune, extolled by moralists, could never have shown Violet so much, during the same short period. Hers was not the so-called sunny temperament, molded for contentment. She looked far, and asked much of life, testing all it offered her with inherited fastidiousness, before she would fully accept, or grant its worth. But this summer of her twenty-first year, happiness took her by surprise. It seized and held her unresisting, spellbound for a season, her seeking spirit at rest. Its ripening warmth lay over her thoughts and utterances, though she spoke less than usual. Its transfiguring touch was on her face, for the curious observer that watched its changes from day to day.

Not for Charles,—he saw no change. He saw what he expected, needed, no more,—what her face had promised him for three years back. The image in a lover's eyes,—especially where the lover is poet too,—while it satisfies him supremely, blinds him; and Charles' eyes were hood-winked by his imagination, quite successfully. Yet even he realized that she had turned her light more fully upon him of late,—that she met him now, if not half-way, at least some distance down the road. It is doubtful if Mr.

Shovell,—being in the insufferably inflated conditions we have confessed,—would have allowed her to come further than that, for he was hot for the assault. In the delightful contest at close quarters, which Violet and he had instituted,—which they were the first in the world to invent, most probably,—he had never, from the opening day, failed to make the utmost of the smallest advantage she would give him: and he naturally pressed his advantage now. What he had lightly termed her “elegance” amused him simply, and teasing her out of her shy entrenchment was his daily game,—though it was frequently his lot to be crushed in turn, when she emerged.

Charles’ views, in this heroic mood, were by no means beyond utterance, and baffled neither his tongue nor his pen to express. His mother laughed half-indignant and half-tender over his naïve confidences. There is no dealing seriously with those whom life is determined to spoil, and Charles’ mother had by now given up warning him to distrust his fate. Since attentive fate, or fortune, had handed him Violet, it was useless, obviously, at least to his own mind; and every letter he sent home served to increase, he trusted, the impression his engagement had originally produced: and made moralizing on the maternal side, as a fact, more impossible. So the Rector’s wife let them be, very wisely, though she thought much of both; and she stored the letters, as she stored all she had ever had from Charles, at the summit of the pile that began far down with his blackened schoolboy scrawls; though she told the Rector severely, on the reception of each in turn, that the boy had no business to trust such things to the public post,—and she could not think what Violet would say, with reason, if she knew.

Whether by virtue of the weather, or these halcyon conditions within, the pair turned excessively energetic in the second half of their stay. They scoured the countryside in all directions, whether in their own company on foot, or on the whirring wheels which Mr. Jones supplied.

They picked up various friends by the way, but Mrs. Shovell continued to be regarded as extremely haughty in her own hotel. There the pair knew nobody well but Jones; and their growing intimacy with Jones was looked upon as an added offense by the spinsters, if not sniffed at as a scandal. For it was evident the Shovells did it because Jones was a convenience: because he fetched and carried for the girl, like a hired footman almost, and lent them his maps and his motor. It was unworthy behavior on the part of both: and on hers (as Mrs. Studley declared) "just like these fast London people." Supercilious, indeed!—not much superciliousness about her when she wanted a spin in Mr. Jones' car! So ran some of the spinsters' speculations; and they played a whole comedy of disgust at the proceedings of the trio, little reckoning how heaven-sent such a subject of scandal really was, in the caged-squirrel round of their lives.

Charles, who let the contents of his mind fall into a happy-go-lucky and rather chaotic state, while he paid close attention to the nourishment of his body, the development of his muscles, and the expansion of his lungs, forgot for many days to tell Violet some of the interesting and necessary things he had collected from the proprietress about the hotel and its inmates past, present, and to come. He brought out surprising scraps of information at intervals, in jerks; and according to Violet's mood, she encouraged or reproved him.

On the last day but one of their stay, he suddenly informed her that "a new woman" was arriving in the course of it: a personage about whom all the hotel was thrilling with interest, because she had a handle to her name.

"I pray heaven you don't know her," said Charles, very gravely.

Violet said she trusted not too: asked him for the name, and then found he had forgotten half of it.

"Lady Alicia somebody," he said. "*The Lady Alicia*, my dear,—aha!" The last name began with a K or a C, he was not sure which.

"Poynter," suggested Violet.

"Poynter it is," said Charles, surprised. "What a smart girl, to be sure. Oh, but you *do* know her then, conf—"

"It's only for two days," Violet consoled him, "and I only know of the woman, really; and she's practically immovable, and not the least interested in me. I shall go up to her chair and say good morning, that is all."

"Her *chair*?" said Charles. "Do you mean bath-chair? This is a girl."

"Oh, my dear Charles, then it isn't Poynter. She is quite fifty, and quite hideous, and a martyr to gout. Try through the alphabet again."

But Charles was positive it was Poynter, and stuck to it. He had heard all about her from Mrs. Tregathwick the week before, and had meant every day to tell Violet, and then forgotten about it. And it was indisputably a fairly young person who was arriving; because she was coming on foot from Penzance. She was making a walking tour round the coast: which, Violet would grant, is not easily accomplished by a chair-ridden martyr to gout.

"It is peculiar enough for a girl to do it alone," said Violet. "And it's odd there should be a young Lady Alicia of the same name. A niece perhaps,—you are sure you did not misunderstand Mrs. Tregathwick, Charles?"

Charles was quite sure. "Because I thought of J. K. instantly," he explained. (J. K. Poynter was a cricketer.) "Perhaps it's one of these marvelous cures. Do you think Lady A. has come across a Christian Scientist at Penzance, and taken up her chair and walked?"

"Don't be absurd, and wicked," said Violet. "Not but what I wish she could, poor old dear," she added.

Later in the day, towards tea-time, Charles came creeping elaborately to Violet, where she sat darning his socks

on the balcony of her own room at the back of the house, for the sake of the cool, and hissed in her ear—"She's come."

"What is she like?" said Violet calmly, threading a needle.

"Perfectly young. You're perfectly off it. Poynter it is," said Charles. "The whole blessed place is in a ferment, and has been fermenting for hours. Corks will fly off in all directions when her ladyship comes in to dinner. If you had a spark of real sympathy, you'd come downstairs and take a hand."

"I have not," said Violet, "in this case. With a girl alone, it's positively horrid. They ought to have more consideration."

"Then you should have come and seen to her, shouldn't you?" argued Charles. "You're married now. Anyhow, it's high time you showed up, unless you want to be cut out completely. Lady A., to judge by accounts, is something quite out of the common run. Shares in Mrs. Shovell," said Charles, sitting down on the balcony-rail to elaborate his theme, "are much below par. Shovells are to be had for the asking. Poynters are looking up. To be scriptural for a change, your glory has departed. It was never more than a reflected luster, after all."

"Reflected from you?" asked Violet.

"I allude to rank and title," said Charles. "Transitory, mundane things. Not beauty, or brains, or merit. A ladyship in the hand is worth any number of birthday baronetcies in the bush. That's what you have been living on up to now, as I supposed you were aware."

"No," said Violet, with a glance at him swinging dangerously on the rail. "However, I am quite content to live upon him. He is my principal claim to distinction, after all."

"Contradiction at this period is best," said Charles. "He is not . . . I am. . . . Now to return to the other girl, your rival. Contrary to our calculations,

she romped in at a quarter to twelve, which, as all the golf-champions agreed, was ripping good time, allowing for her starting from Penzance at nine. She certainly did not go round the coast, and probably she bicycled."

"Don't do that, dear," Violet inserted gently. "It's very clever, but you will break your neck."

Charles, thinking solely of his tale, got off the rail and stood up, his hands behind him. The unconscious obedience was even more boyish than his preceding gymnastics on the balustrade, and Violet was smiling, her head bent low over her work, as he proceeded:

"She should have been greeted with a cheer. Instead of that she dodged neatly, passed in by the back unnoticed, left her traps in her room, and went out to lunch. General collapse of Jones' girls, who were posted in the front, with binoculars."

"Of *whom*?" said Violet, laying down his sock, and gazing at him wide-eyed.

"Jones calls them girls,—I don't," explained Charles. "We have agreed to differ. . . . Well, her ladyship looked in once, I hear, during the afternoon, and everybody had a go at her. She is more naturally easy-mannered than *you* are, darling, and infinitely better style. That on the authority of Mrs. Studley, the dear little woman who dresses so well. I got it secondhand through Jones, who was fuming. Jones hates Mrs. Studley, I can't think why. You wouldn't think, to look at Marmaduke, he had such evil passions, would you?"

"No," said Violet. "Go on about the other girl, because I want to know."

"Oh, you don't really get much out of 'em," said Charles. "She's fair, anyhow. She is one of our real true-blue British blondes, according to an authority you will recognize. I rather think she 'stunned' that lady as well. She is—let me see—she is far from well-groomed, according to Jones' girls, who know what the word means,—I never do. But then, she had walked from Penzance

in record time; so if ill-groomed means dusty—does it?”

“I haven’t an idea,” said Violet.

“Put it at that,” said Charles. “You can lend her a clothes-brush, when you get intimate. . . . She is, in addition, a deuced taking little lady, and evidently up to snuff. That on the authority of Mr. Studley——”

“Thank you,” cried Violet, throwing aside the sock. “I can do without Mr. Studley’s opinions. How *can* you, Charles? Where *is* the poor girl?” She sat up in her deck-chair and caught the balcony-rail.

“Run along and chaperon her,” said Charles, with an easy smile. “I said she wanted you, didn’t I? We men are such ruffians,—aren’t we? I waited till Studley had finished his remarks on that head,—it took some time,—and then said what I thought of him, rather loud. I think it carried into all the corners, though that ‘lounge’ of theirs is a cornery place. Hole-and-cornery,” added Charles, elaborating tranquilly as ever.

“Did you?” Violet sank back. “I am rather glad. He does need snubbing badly, doesn’t he?”

“She turned white with rage,” said Charles. “The wife, I mean,—but she didn’t say anything. She hasn’t any spunk,—nor has he,—they only hate me. They’ll hate you worse too, ducky; so look out. The little New Yorker, who is much the best of them, backed me like winking. She had been languishing for a man to say just that, Mr. Shovell, and she was going out, right away, to find that girl and make friends. . . . Consequently, my blessed child,” concluded Charles, locking his two hands suddenly under Violet’s chin from above, “you need not fag, and can sit tight, because, when our young friend Hattie says a thing she ups and does it, slick away. Not to mention there’s more than a chance her ladyship *is* bad style, after all. Because Studley’s approval goes for more than his wife’s—any day,” added Charles reflectively.

Violet said she would see at dinner. Pending the hour of dressing for that meal, however, she decided to let the disputant parties below-stairs cool off without her interference, and to finish Charles' other sock.

Towards the dinner-hour she slipped down, white-clad, her father's pearls about her neck. She flitted like a moth through the usual little group about the door, whose talk instinctively fell lower at the sight of her, turning her head about as she went to look for Charles. There were innumerable hiding-places, as he had said, but she could not discover him in the entrance-hall or the veranda.

"Has my husband gone out?" she queried lightly, as she bent her head a very little to the salute of the burliest golfing-man, sitting at the door.

Her husband had walked a bit along the terrace, he told her, and couldn't be far. She thanked him, remarked on the exquisite light, which was glorifying all without, and to which her informant's back was solidly turned, and went on her way. He looked after her, with heavy bleared eyes, even as a bull might look after a butterfly that had settled near it for an instant.

"Knows how to walk, that girl," was all he found to say, after an interval; but the other bride, Mrs. Studley, whom he addressed, bit her lip. The other bride could compete with Violet in all lines quite successfully,—even her father, mayor of his native town, had been knighted,—but it never struck her that there was more than one way to walk: or that such a very stupid man as that by the door could notice it, if there was.

As Violet came up to Charles, he was standing still, his back to her.

"Hist!" he murmured without turning. "Come alongside. There she is."

At the end of the hill-side terrace, studded with seats at intervals, on which the hotel was perched, a flight of steps led up from the street below. Several people were

mounting, in the clear evening light, trespassing on the hotel property, of deliberate intent, to get the view. About the sunset hour this often happened, and was winked at by the authorities so long as the private visitors were not ousted or inconvenienced. As Violet reached Charles' side, a girl came up, followed by a man. The man, after looking about him, seemed to realize he was on private ground, turned, and slunk down again; the girl came on towards them, with a swinging, rather defiant gait. She was clad in tweed, loosely cut: a felt hat was crammed rather low over her eyes, but worn with indefinable art,—a certainty of effect: and no swaggering could quite conceal her body's grace. Before she reached the Shovells, becoming aware, no doubt, of the marvelous illumination in the sky to her left, she paused uncertainly, and then dropped onto one of the seats, where two others of the hotel visitors were already seated to admire.

"Dash!" muttered Charles, for the young lady was carelessly occupying two places on which he had had his eye. Violet and he strolled slowly forward, side by side, her eyes diverted to the cloud-pageant, his seeking mechanically a place for her on the seats in sight, for the spectacle in the sky was now attracting all the world, and the terrace being a good point of view, competition for places was increasing.

"There's room for one," he murmured to her discreetly, as they reached the bench on which the young Lady Alicia was seated. The other two occupants, either taking the hint, or having admired enough, rose suddenly, and moved away from them.

"*A la bonne heure*," said Violet lightly. "Now we can gloat at our ease."

The girl before them stirred and lifted her eyes, which had been fixed rather sullenly on the sunset. As they lifted—they were very remarkable eyes—Violet stopped with a start.

"Lisette!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, damn," said the young lady, not loud, but perfectly audible. She seemed to gather her lithe limbs together, as a hare does before it flies. Charles, at the double exclamation, turned about amazed.

"How did you get here?" said Violet, rather breathless with the shock. Her hand had dropped from her husband's arm. The girl on the seat shot a glance at him before she spoke.

"That's my own affair. How did you?"

"I am staying here,—have been for two weeks."

"Not in this hotel?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I am staying for two nights,—on my way to London. On my way to Paris, finally." She spoke defiantly. "I never thought of seeing *you*, though." She gazed with resentment at the other girl.

"Paris?" queried Violet. "But where are the others, then?"

"At home, to be sure,—where should they be? That's where I've come from."

"From Torquay? To-day? But how?"

"I shan't tell you," said Lisette at leisure, and glanced at Charles again.

"By the way,"—Violet was reminded,—"*may* I present my husband? It is Miss Felicia Addenbroke, Charles."

"Your *husband*?" said Miss Addenbroke, her jaw dropping. "Are you *married*?"

"To be sure, for a month past. Surely Mother wrote,—hadn't you heard?"

"That's why I didn't see your name on the list, then," said the girl, hitting the seat with her clenched hand. "Ass, not to think of it! What's your name?" Her singular, quick glance turned to Charles.

"Shovell," he said, half laughing, "at your service."

Miss Addenbroke's manner, to a complete stranger, was amusing. It was familiar, and yet not especially offensive,

by virtue of the absolute indifference of her regard. This was the manner, no doubt, which had so gravely misled the hotel gentlemen. A Studley might easily have misunderstood it, reflected Charles.

"Shovell,—oh yes," she repeated. A pause. "Now I think, Honoria did mention you were engaged. Cousin Eveleen wrote to her about it." Felicia was staring at Violet again. She had beautiful, strange eyes, a little dilated, and Charles was searching his memory desperately to determine where he had seen them before. Then he remembered his mother-in-law's had the same shape and fine curved lashes, though their glance was quite different. Much interested, and quite quiescent, Charles stood sentry by, and watched the pair of girls.

"Did it surprise you?" Violet said of her engagement.

"No." Lisette thrust her lip forward, like Eveleen again for the moment. "If it had, I shouldn't have forgotten about it, should I? The Ingestres do marry,—somehow,—I suppose you've got that in you,—I forget."

"Certainly," said Violet. "I even bear the name."

"Do you? Well, it's a good one. I always forget relations, and those things. Honoria's engaged too; you mayn't have heard. Oh yes, she is,—it's the news of the day. Surprised she hasn't written you about it, she has most people. Lord, such a man,—you'd laugh. . . . So, you see, there's hope for all of us," Felicia added. She shifted her position slightly, and folded her arms. "What's *my* name, do you suppose?" she inquired. "Have a guess." She included Charles, by a sliding glance, in the invitation.

"But we know," cried Violet. "How *could* you, Lisette? How did you ever think of it?"

"Well,—I wanted to be respectable down here: so I thought of the worst frump of my acquaintance,—see? She often comes to Torquay, you know,—Aunty and she love the same clergyman. That shows she's respectable,

doesn't it?—so I took her name. It's great fun,—I'd like to tell her. Perhaps when I get to London I will."

"Don't be silly," said Violet gravely. "Turn your thoughts to us, Charles and me,—the quandary you put us into. Whatever are we to do at dinner, for instance? You don't expect us to *use* that name? Good gracious, why,"—she looked disconsolately at the girl before her,—“I should laugh, every time. I *know* the woman, you see."

Another pause, Felicia considering it. "He can call me Lisette," she remarked, nodding at Charles. "That'll do all right. It stands for Alicia just as well. Alicia—Felicia,—see? Now don't go saying I'm not clever," she concluded with a nod at Violet. "I thought of that before you did, anyhow. You're clever, aren't you? Are those pearls real?"

Violet did not answer the last sudden inquiry. Her hand had risen unaware to her necklace, teasing the row of pearls while she reflected, which was what had led Miss Addenbroke's errant attention to dwell on them, probably.

"Dear," she said, with sudden soft decision, laying the same hand on Charles' arm,—“we have barely any time. Do you terribly mind going,—quick, before they ring,—and having Lisette's place moved up next to mine? Mrs. Tregathwick is so kind, and I am sure Mr. Jones will not object, if you explain."

Charles nodded to her look, and went,—flew, rather—light-footed in his light shoes. He was an elegant runner, and the asphalt road was tempting, straight and clean. So Charles streaked to the hotel, as on a race-course. Felicia Addenbroke looked after him.

"He might have had the tact to go before," said Violet, taking the seat at her side. "Isn't that what you are thinking? But he could hardly know, poor boy, could he?"

"Do *you* know?" said Felicia, staring again at Charles' wife; through her, rather, for her eyes at close quarters had not the grasping quality.

"I had a note from Mother, and she sent Cousin Agnes' on. I think, now, you had better tell me everything, hadn't you, Lisette? It's simpler, now we are all together. Come to our room, on the second floor, after dinner,—won't you? I can get rid of Charles."

"He can hear if he wants," said the girl. "I'm not ashamed of anything. There is nothing really to tell. How did you find him?" she added, sullenly rather, and lowering her tone, since Violet was close to her.

"Find Charles? He found me. Let me see,"—she leant back to reflect,—"you remember the Gibbs girls, don't you?—Margery and Maud. Charles' mother married their father, that's all. So we all became acquainted."

"Margery,—that was the pretty one," said Lisette, seeming to catch a wandering memory. "Why didn't he marry her?"

"Well, dear,—I suppose because Sir Robert Brading came along, and asked her first. So Charles fell back on me," said Violet gently.

"That's a way of boasting," remarked Lisette, lifting a hand for an instant to Violet's pearls. The gesture, bold in fact, like her speech, was coaxing in manner, childish almost, and invited gentle treatment.

"Is it? Perhaps it is," laughed Violet. "Mayn't you boast a little on your wedding journey?"

Felicia, for all reply, took her cousin's hand up and examined the rings upon it, with furtive, cautious fingers. At the same time she wrinkled her little nose, as though investigating the vague dry scent that clung to Mrs. Shovell's wedding clothes. Then, her finger-tips on the bridal hoop, she shifted her eyes for a minute to Violet's face. As she did so, she passed the tip of a little red tongue across her lips. She had done this once or twice before, in the course of her idle, rather defiant remarks. It is a well-known feverish symptom, for it means that the lips are dry.

"Inexplicable, I admit it," said Violet, smiling, for the

glance from ring to face had spoken; "but it is so, all the same. You are like a cat, Lisette. Rather a wild cat, though. Why don't you get married, dear? You couldn't have any difficulty."

"Couldn't I? All you know about it," said the girl. She got up on the words, and stood restlessly. "I'll tell you after dinner, perhaps," she said. "Some of it: I'll tell you less lies than Honoria, anyhow. Honoria simply *makes* you lie. Honoria is—damnable. I'm going in to tidy now," she added indifferently. "I shall be late, I expect. I've nothing to wear, of course." She stopped, glancing at the pearls again.

"You're lovely anyhow," said Violet. "You know that very well. You shall have anything you want of mine, though," she added gently, her eyes distracted to the entrancing sky.

"Anything I want! What a way to talk! You know I can't, so you tell lies about it. You've got everything, haven't you? Cheap way of being nice, I call it." After these expressions of opinion, Lisette added, "Are you going on sitting there?"

"A minute or two, I must. The color's so perfect as it dies,—so cold."

"Umph!" said Felicia dubiously. She glanced once at the sunset, wrinkling her little nose again, in criticism evidently. "It's not so bad," she admitted, "but no good to paint. I can't ever remember colors afterwards—Father could. . . . Violet, I say,—are those pearls real?"

II

Charles did not address Miss Addenbroke by her pet name at dinner, as invited, and Violet was equally careful to avoid all unnecessary appendages when she spoke. Felicia herself talked very little during the earlier part of the meal. She sat eating, and gazing before her; but for all that, the impression of intimacy between her

and the girl at her elbow seemed to penetrate, and reach the popular attention. For one thing, that attention was so pressing as to be disagreeable, at least to one of the pair; for another, Lisette herself was quite careless of the part she had undertaken, and used Violet's first name when she happened to want it, asking her to pass things, loudly; for a third, she was actually wearing a blouse of Mrs. Shovell's: as at any rate one suspicious eye discerned.

"She knows her," muttered Mrs. Studley to her spouse. "She must have done before. They only had ten minutes before dinner together, because I watched. She must hang on to a pretty good set, then," she admitted grudgingly. She spoke, as need not be said, of Violet, since Lisette's "handle" secured her from criticism.

Mr. Studley, who did nothing but stare at the newcomer like a man in an hypnotic trance, hardly heard. Half the world was staring in fascination, wonder, or in vague discomfort. When Lisette walked in to dinner, quite late, having thrown on a blouse of her cousin's, and hardly touched her hair, dragged low by the felt hat into a mat on her forehead, the hotel had its long-coveted sensation. Corks, as Charles put it, flew off. Lisette could not see her place at first in the crowded room, and made her little private grimaces, as she stood consulting with the waiter, and looking up and down for it.

"She is much—much lovelier than I remembered," moaned Violet softly to Charles. "I cannot introduce her to Mr. Jones, darling; I simply cannot do it. If I say Alicia Poynter, with that absurd thing in front of me, I shall inevitably laugh aloud; and then neither Lisette nor Marmaduke will ever forgive me. You really must come to my assistance, Charles. I am getting hysterical. The original Alicia is so very frightful, if you knew."

Charles hardly felt like laughing. The general petrified interest in the girl almost scared him, thinking of his wife's tacit assumption of the guardianship of this impossible

little creature. Charles felt like an anxious father of a family, almost, as he rose, drew Felicia's chair back in his best manner, and when she was within it, murmured the ridiculous travesty of her real name to Jones. He dared not look to see how Jones took it; nor did Lisette look at Jones,—she looked at the menu which he handed. And Jones, at her side, appeared ten times more staidly commonplace, so much so as to verge upon the comical. He was a general object of envy to his sex, but he did not seem fully to appreciate his situation. He glanced beyond his new neighbor constantly, his air protesting very faintly. He had got used to Mrs. Shovell's proximity at dinner, and to her soft remarks; and, since Jones was a creature of custom, he missed her. Added to this, he could not see Lisette so well as the rest of the room, since she was squeezed against his elbow; so any consolation he might thus have been permitted was denied him.

Felicia Addenbroke was fair,—fair as a water-wraith. Mrs. Studley, even with the aid of the most skilful and persistent dyeing, could never have hit the tint of her pale gold hair,—an ashen gold, most delicate and unusual. Nor could art have imitated the way it grew, twining in all directions, embracing her ears, and flattering the nape of her enchanting neck. In itself, the hair was sufficient fascination; but Lisette went further. She distracted the unwary by her use of her extraordinary eyes; she ensnared them by every new position of her constantly changing mouth. She bit her lip a good deal, a sign of uncertainty and weakness: but far from unbecoming, as the connoisseur will admit, to a pretty mouth and teeth. She did not seem to like looking at anybody much, and kept her lashes lowered a good deal. But at any sudden clash in the serving, or unwary voice, she threw a glance from her—no other phrase would describe such swiftness—in that direction. Her senses, like an animal's, were evidently exquisitely keen, and her nerves on edge. Lisette was also, like all artists in sensation, a gourmand, not to

use a harder English title. She took the best part of every dish submitted to her, with quiet deliberation, and ate it attentively. She also took wine, and Violet kept an eye sidelong upon her glass and its refilling. It would seem she had some recollection of such a taste in the young lady; for, at a point towards the end of the meal, she reached a hand across inconspicuously, and held Miss Addenbroke's right wrist, as the waiter with the decanters approached.

Lisette, as he passed unsummoned, made a face at her captor, and laughed slightly. Nobody else espied the movement, with the exception of Marmaduke Jones. Jones could not help seeing the clever little hand, with its swift, decided movement towards him, which pinioned his neighbor's supple white wrist for that short moment. It was the first,—absolutely the first—incident of the meal that really fixed his attention on the girl at his side. He observed that, wilful as she looked, she was submissive to the tacit warning; only pouting, sly, and a trifle amused.

By rank ill-luck for Jones, Lisette caught his eye before he could withdraw it:

"She thinks I've had enough," she remarked to him, with her astounding manner of familiarity, the same she had used to Charles. "She thinks she's married, so she can manage me. That's what they always do. She's younger really,—a kid. How old are you, Violet?—He wants to know." Turning to her other hand again, she nodded backwards to the gentleman on her right.

To say that Jones would never have thought of putting such a question is, his chronicler hopes, quite unnecessary. He would have sunk beneath the table sooner. It was simply Lisette's native naughtiness, and he held his breath until the answer came. So did others within range, for the question had been recklessly loud. Fortunately, Mrs. Shovell seemed amused. "I am twenty and a half,—a largish half. What are you telling Mr. Jones about me, please?"

"What did I say?" Felicia, quite content, turned back again. "I'm a year older easily. I'm quite grown up,—of age,—I dare say I shall get married soon. When I am, perhaps she will let me alone to manage my drinks,—what do you say?" She flung a wonderful glance at Jones, and then another at Violet. "Though I don't suppose I shall ever wear such pearls as those." Her voice sank into confidence on the last phrase. "Her father's rich, you know, and spoils her. So did mine. I was spoiled,—great Scott, wasn't I just!—till he died. I did as I liked at home. But he couldn't give me things, for the best of reasons, so here I am without clothes to my back. Fact!"—she showed the unwilling Jones her sleeve.—"That isn't mine, it's hers. I shall keep it, though,—rather. It suits me. She said I could have anything of hers I wanted, and I shall. People should say what they mean, shouldn't they?"

Marmaduke was too completely overpowered by this titled lady's behavior to answer her constant appeals for sympathy, still less to contradict any of the opinions so freely presented to him; and so far Lisette barely left him the time. Having fed herself, she felt comfortable, and prepared to chatter; and since fate offered her Jones to chatter to, she accepted him, having appraised the article with a pout before she began. He had been introduced to her, anyhow,—not that it would have made much difference if he had not. Having said her say, she leant back, and gave him another wonderful glance in the pause. She thought he might offer something, to induce a pleasant argument, and waited to see what it was.

Lisette rarely coquetted; as with Violet's mother, it was rarely necessary. She noticed her own effect on people, that was all. She had noticed it, with advantageous results, from the age of four years old. But her effect on this man was not noticeable, at least to her rather undiscerning eyes. He showed none of the ordinary signs, the ready and gallant response, to which Miss Lisette was

accustomed. He might, of course, be afraid of her,—that occurred now and then, and amused Lisette prodigiously when it did. Yet he did not shrink visibly,—he showed singularly little emotion of any sort. He looked a trifle puzzled, perhaps as to the moral question she had raised—the question as to the possession of the blouse. That subject would do to argue on as well as another.

“Don’t you think it suits me?” asked Lisette, thinking it might be the artistic point on which he disagreed. “I thought it did, up there, but I hadn’t time to look long. She turned the light out. I hoped they’d stick me down at dinner in front of a glass. They often do at these places. Then I could see if it suited me really.”

“It might suit other people just as well,” remarked Jones, fidgeting with his fork. On strictly moral points, Jones could generally be quite clear in his own mind, and was ready, when challenged, to offer a modest opinion. But on the question of this particular piece of feminine apparel he felt at sea. It happened to be of a particularly lovely shade of twilight blue, a fabric of veiled lights and soft shadows, bewildering even as to color for ordinary man to define. Pale blue is a tint which fair-haired and dark-haired ladies may equally well assume,—no denying it, with the evidence supplied. Jones had got used to it with dark hair, but that was hardly a presentable argument; the girl wore it in a way to make Studley stare,—an objection even less possible to advance. Worst of all, whatever he said, Lady Whatever-she-was might turn to Mrs. Shovell again and betray him. His was a false position,—really horrible in the circumstances. There seemed nothing for it but to be honest, a thing not difficult as a rule to Jones: but it cost him more of an effort than usual.

“Other people!” Felicia laughed out, all her little white teeth gleaming for an instant. “Why, there *aren’t* any others when I like a thing! Didn’t you guess that?—I know what you mean, though,” she added with a soft, sly look. “You mean she looks as nice in it as I do. Well,

why don't you say so, then? I shouldn't care. I say what I mean, and I want other people to."

"Will your ladyship stop saying what you mean to Mr. Jones,"—Mrs. Shovell's voice beyond intervened again, and Marmaduke breathed more freely,—“and come upstairs with us? I am sure for one evening he has been instructed sufficiently.”

“Oh well, I don't care,” said Felicia, her usual fashion of assenting. “We can go on to-morrow,—I've another night. I love arguing,” she added unnecessarily, as she rose. With a last glance at the uncomfortable Jones, she departed, leaving him, as was probable, to be teased by the whole circle of his acquaintance when the ladies were gone.

“We shall have to take her between us, Charles, to-morrow,” observed Violet, when the trio had left the dining-room, and were upon the stairs. “She is really not to be trusted.”

“Oh well, I shan't mind,” said Felicia calmly. “But I shall swear and shock him,—and what will you say then?” She wrinkled her impudent nose at Violet.

“You can't teach him any swear-words that he doesn't know,” said Violet,—too audaciously as her husband thought. “You should have heard him the other day on the sand.”

“Is he so wicked?” said Lisette. “I'm glad of that. I like people to be wicked, a little bit. Not too much, of course, but rather. It's better than the other thing, anyhow,—like Aunt. I'd sooner have him,”—she nodded at Charles,—“than that other man, the dull one that sat by me. He's something to say for himself, anyhow.”

“Thanks,” said Charles, “awfully. I'll keep it dark from Jones.”

“You needn't,” returned Lisette. “He doesn't care for me much. He won't mind what I think about him, anyhow. He's a stuck-up sort.” Turning from Charles with indifference, she took Violet's arm as they reached the upper floor. “He didn't care for me teasing him, you

know," she said, in confidence. "He didn't think I ought to have this blouse."

"Nor does Charles," said Violet. "It's the color he likes. Ask him what he thinks about the matter."

"I shan't," said Lisette. "He's stuffy,—I shall ask you. You'll give it to me, won't you?" She squeezed the arm she held, pushing close.

"Of course, dear, if you're sure you like no other better. You might change your mind again. You dressed rather hastily, didn't you?"

Mrs. Shovell gave two touches to Felicia's hair in front, looking her calmly in the eyes. They had reached their private room now, and were facing each other on the hearth. They were certainly curiously contrasted, not only in surface coloring, though such a meeting of morning and dusk might well captivate a man's imagination. But Charles, though a poet in his way, was not thinking of externals for the moment. He was vexed in mind,—not jealous or ill-tempered as the girl seemed to imagine. His wife's way of managing the creature was instinctive, and he had left the opening tactics willingly to her; but he did not see, ultimately, what good a girl like that could do Violet, or *vice versa*. There was an inner complexion, as well as an outer, to be considered; a fine spiritual bloom which, even if Violet had not possessed it, Charles' form of adoration would have supplied. He had a strong feeling, in short, that he, personally, was an element in this situation; and an element whose intervention might at any moment be required.

"Go away!" said Lisette to him sharply, having watched Violet's face for an interval, biting her lip. "Send him away," she jerked to her cousin. "I'm going to cry."

On the words she sank on a convenient chair in a graceful heap, and broke into furious sobbing, her fair head in her hands.

"Will you go, dear?" said Mrs. Shovell, turning with raised brows. "And tell them *not* coffee, please,—we had better be alone. Leave me a cigarette, there's an angel,—I think that's all." She looked delicate and dubious, to the critic's eye.

"She'd better go to bed, I should think," said Charles, propping himself obstinately, hands behind, against the mantelshelf. Lisette on her chair was weeping with the abandon of a child—a piteously lovely sight.

"No, no,—it is useless with anything on your mind. I don't suppose she has slept for nights. I shan't get it, probably,—I know what she is, and how those other two have hardened her,—but I shall do my best." She spoke low and hurriedly, under cover of Felicia's sobs, avoiding his eye as she spoke. It struck Charles she was proposing to do the thing she had been forbidden to do,—by her husband.

"I think you had better let me," he observed, in a superior dry manner.

"Why? I know her,—not well, but I know the variety. I have had it before me," said Violet, "all my life. They have turned her out, or something like it, I suspect. I dare say she went too far, if she was like this."

"And may again," he appended, preserving his attitude. There was a pause, in which Lisette's sobs were strongly audible, so strongly that it sounded a little forced, as though she were recovering.

"Don't you trust me?" said Violet, her tone uncertain: and there was a pause.

"What are you talking about, you two?" gasped Lisette, turning her dishevelled head on her bare arm. "You're talking about me,—I know. You fancy all sorts of things,—and there's nothing. There isn't anything,—I'm only sick to death of the infernal fools they are."

"Be quiet—we do not," said Violet quietly. "We fancy nothing whatever, until we hear,—it is wiser. Do you mind his staying, Lisette? He wants to stay."

"Yes," she shot. "I'm sick of them, I tell you. Send him right away; you said you would. You promised. I've never known a woman fit to speak to, all my life. Call themselves *women*, those two!—my God!"

"Stop swearing," said Charles sharply, turning on his heel. "Promise to behave decently and I may go."

"May you?" the girl muttered. "You will if she says so, jolly fast. What were you saying about me, just now?" Her marvelous eyes fixed Charles. "What did you say?"

"Nothing." He diverted his own glance involuntarily.

"What do you think, then? Better say it out. Oh, I know you! You think I'll hurt her, don't you? 'Cause she's so young, and your property, I suppose." Lisette gazed at him mercilessly, her chin on the back of the chair she was embracing, mischief dawning in her wide eyes, tear-trimmed as their lashes yet were. "Men always think that," she said, "and always will. They're all the same. . . . Well, listen here: she's not yours,—she's mine if I want. She's my cousin,—one of our lot, anyhow,—quite a nice little decent thing. . . . That's what I said to Honoria, when Cousin Eveleen's letter came,—just to hear her snort. Violet's been called clever to us, smart and so on, ever so long back, so Honoria can't let her alone. She's jealous,—couldn't bear her being engaged. She wasn't then herself, and thought she never would be,—old horse! She said she supposed it was the money, and she expected you were a fool."

Violet laughed easily. "That was really a good effort for the brilliant Honoria," she said, "wasn't it, Lisette?"

As she spoke, standing to the rear of the girl and facing Charles, she signalled to the door imperiously. Lisette had dropped her dishevelled head again. Charles, receiving the mute command, strode to the door, and after a moment's hesitation, went through it and shut it behind him.

It came home to him, perhaps, that he was a fool, com-

pared with Violet, at this work of dealing with tortured souls. She had the noble gift from the other "lot,"—not Lisette's,—from the great physician her father, and behind him generations of courageous thoughtful men. From the Ingestre "lot" she had singularly little: external details merely,—finishing touches such as her beautiful clear skin, a kitten-love of being petted, warring constantly with the Ashwin shyness,—and the aristocratic manner (Charles laughed ruefully as he remembered it) she had used just now. For a thing so comparatively small and slight, Violet could be dignified; she could face a roomful effectively without assistance; and she could, at will, as he now recollected, frighten her husband terribly. Of late she had not attempted it, it was true; but he could think of occasions before marriage when she had reduced him in just that manner; and it struck him that the power she sheathed might very well also be the gift of a lordly stock: a stock which, as in the case of this exquisite Felicia, assumed placable acquiescence beforehand in its most unreasonable demands.

Charles went below and walked about for a long time on the terrace, restively. He had been indignant, agitated, and a little offended too, and he needed a lengthy dose of the night air to cool him down. He could not, he found, escape thinking of the strange girl merely by leaving her presence: if only for the sake of abusing Lisette, he had to think. He reviewed again,—for they were imprinted on his memory,—all her incomparable attitudes, tones and movements in turn. He saw well how beautiful she was, and how much more beautiful she would be, for the Ingestres were singularly ageless, came to their full development slowly, and still made conquests when they were grandmothers, as Eveleen Ashwin probably would. He was well aware of a rather resentful admiration, an inner relish withal, careless and rough such as that which Studley had unwisely expressed,—and a keen curiosity to

see her again, different and perhaps more brilliant yet in the sharp insistent light of day. He was vexed with her intrusion, a good deal more than was necessary, or than would have been necessary with a less intrinsically exciting person; and he was vexed in addition that Violet should squander her fine sympathy, risk her fine susceptibility, where both were all too probably wasted, in a second-rate and sordid cause.

But, ridiculously enough, the thing that haunted Charles with the most persistent annoyance, even when he considered he had quite cooled and ordered his volcanic thoughts that night, was—that he did not want Felicia to have that moonlight blouse of Violet's, which he knew on Violet, and which *was* her, consequently, to his masculine idea,—and startle the world into supposing that it became her better, when it did not! He shared an original instinct, in this matter, in favor of the first possessor, with Marmaduke Jones.

III

It was late in the evening before the importunate girl's demands allowed Charles to return to his own, and he became highly indignant. Violet had no right, naturally, to attend to a girl in his despite. It was his honeymoon, anyhow, and Lisette was as remote, to all right-thinking minds, as a bolt from another star,—not wanted. When he was at length allowed to enter his own room, and resume the ownership of his wife, he found her leaning against the mantelpiece, a hand supporting her brow (ashamed of herself, probably), in a pose of languor and reflection; while Lisette, looking greatly restored and extremely lively, not to say mischievous, lay sidelong in Charles' own special chair, his cigarette between her white teeth, and his—that is, his wife's—priceless pearl necklace in her hands.

"Look at her," complained Violet. "She's taking all

my things away, one by one. I've nothing to play with, Charles. The loss of the pearls I can endure,—just,—but I did want that smoke so badly. I was saving it up till the end, for a treat, and then she snatched it before I could touch. Isn't she a horrid girl?"

Lisette, at the charge, laughed low and delightfully. She did not move, or notice Charles, which annoyed him the more,—naturally. She was considering the pearls, in detail, with her soft finger-tips and long-lashed eyes.

"I can supply one loss at any rate," he said, stopping to feel in his pocket. "Catch." He tossed Violet his cigarette-case, his eyes resting the while on the delinquent, who was pouting in the chair. "I think I can remedy the other too." He walked up to Miss Addenbroke, and said carelessly, "Thanks,—those are ours."

"They're real," observed Lisette to him in confidence, disregarding the extended hand. "I asked her three times before she'd tell me,—she's so rude,—but they are."

"Some people might call the question rude," said Charles coolly. "Give them here."

"The question? Why? Wouldn't you let her go about in sham pearls? Lots of people do, quite smart ones, I can tell you."

"I dare say you know all about it," said Charles. "Give them here."

"They're not yours," said Lisette.

"They are," said Charles,—the snap of a nursery quarrel.

"You're cross because I kept her," said Lisette. "I wouldn't let her call you before. I wish I hadn't at all, I'm sure. Isn't he horrid, Vi?"

"Take care, dear,—he'll break out," said Violet. "He can't abide that abbreviation."

"Abbreviation?" She repeated it prettily, quite without comprehension. "I don't see why he's in a temper," persisted Lisette. "I wouldn't have a man that's always in a temper about me, anyhow."

Charles bit his lip,—Violet laughed.

"Let her alone, Charles," she said. "You'll get the worst of it. She has absolutely no scruples in what she says, which gives her an unfair advantage."

"You'd better clear out," said Charles, turning his back, perhaps partly to hide his face. "It's late." He had never been as rude as this in words to a woman before.

"If you want to kiss her, don't mind me," said Felicia, demure and sly as ever, and still examining the necklace, pearl by pearl. "That's what I said to Honoria's man,—who was redder than you, and much stuffier about it. Perhaps he didn't want to do it," she added softly. "I shouldn't, anyhow. Great Scott!"

"Vulgar little beast," muttered Charles, to ease his mind. Violet by the hearth was still laughing under her hand, which fact particularly outraged him. He did not consider Violet ought to laugh at such things, whatever he was inclined to do.

"Don't be cross," she said, shifting the sheltering hand to glance his way. "It is so hopeless. I am long—long through that. . . . Lisette, isn't it bed-time? Don't you think so? It's been such an exhausting day."

"Has it,—for you?" said Felicia. "I've given her a time of it,"—to Charles. "Not quite so bad as Honoria, 'cause she's younger, but a time. I used awful words. Once, I nearly made her cry. I thought she was going to, but she didn't,—laughed instead. Now she wants to go to bed, naturally,—but *you* told me to clear out." She threw the pearls on the table with a clash. "I can't see what a girl's to do, between you all. Perhaps I'll go."

She got up, stretching her lithe limbs deliciously. Then she laughed of a sudden at their faces.

"I'd never be married," she announced, "if it makes you sulky like that. It looks silly, I can tell you. Standing with his back turned!—Why doesn't he look at me? He's afraid, that's what it is." She nodded at Violet. "Lots of people are afraid of me."

"Who wonders?" said Violet beneath her breath, "you marvelous thing. Will you give me my chain again, Lisette? You snatched it from me rather rudely, you know, just now."

"Didn't you mean me to have it, then?" said Felicia. "I thought that's what you meant. Oh well, here goes for the present." She took, carried, and clasped it about her cousin's throat, looking at it all the time. "There," she said, with a final pat. "That's just how it was,—biggest in the middle. I like that big fellow, one of the best. Has Cousin Eveleen got one too?"

"No. Heaps of jewels, but not that."

Felicia whistled, her eyes widening. "Gave it to you, did he?—and left her out? I wouldn't stand that, anyhow, if I were Cousin Eveleen. I say,—don't they fight like cats, those two? Honoria says they do."

"Honoria does not know everything," said Violet crisply.

"No. . . . What's-his-name,—her husband,—I forget."

"My mother's husband? My father, you mean? Ashwin."

"Ashwin, oh yes. . . . I wish I knew him," said Lisette. "Would he give pearls to me?"

"I shouldn't wonder—the least," said Violet, looking at her seriously. "Not the very least, if you went to stay."

"I'd like to go to stay there. I went once with Honoria; for somebody's dance it was,—just the night. Stodgy old dance, not much to go for,—but it was a smart house to stay in. . . . I remember," said Felicia thoughtfully.

"So do I," Violet assured her. "So does my father. We were both on the premises, you know."

"Were you?" Lisette looked at her in her charming vacant manner. "I never remember people much. It's people have to remember me,—see?" She touched the pearls again. "Real things," she murmured lingeringly. "Everything real in a place like that. That's what I like,—Honoria doesn't care."

"You should have nothing that is not perfect," said Violet. "Anyone can see that at a glance."

"Oh,—can they?" she laughed. "I wish they did, anyhow." She turned confidential, being near. "Father,—my father,—painted me once in a shell. I had pearls, but not real ones. It was by the sea. I had nothing on——"

"Charles,—wait,—be gentle," cried Violet, low and entreatingly. "Too exquisite it is. Imagine, in a shell! How old were you, darling, then?"

"Six," said Felicia, very simply. She had shrunk a little from Charles' violent movement towards her, and was holding Violet's arm. "I was twelve when he died, you know. . . . When he was smashed," she added, shrugging curiously.

It was her last effort of sincerity. She decided to go. She moved slowly,—slid, one might have said,—to the door, where Mr. Shovell was standing markedly, his hand upon the latch, ready to open it. Then she laughed once more, quite involuntarily, at his face.

"I said it like that to shock you," she observed. "About the shell,—I knew it would. You're not so clever as she is——" And she went.

"Good Lord!" said Charles with fervor, having re-shut the door. He wiped his brow. Then he laughed himself, shortly,—much as though his strong resentment and natural good-temper met in an equal shock. Then he walked back to Violet, and with a curious manner of determination, took her in his arms.

"Sorry I jogged her," he remarked, in a manner not quite his own. "I don't believe she'd ever have gone without it,—and she'd got to go."

Violet was absent, rather. "Did you have a nice walk, downstairs?"

"No," said Charles, in precisely the manner of a person saying "Yes."

"Isn't it a nice night? I thought I saw a moon. . . . Charles! It occurs to me I want to pay Lisette's bill these two days: and I haven't money enough, really. You'll have to fork out, do you hear?"

"Don't care if I do," said Charles, carelessly agreeable. He was holding her tightly, however.

"Good boy. Now give me time, and I'll think of the next thing. There are heaps." She closed her eyes, slightly frowning, to think.

"That little spitfire has been tiring you," said Charles.

"No, really. She is only a little tiring to the soul, that sort of girl. Poor dear, it's not her fault."

"Said you were tired," returned Charles coolly. "There's black under your eyes at this minute,—*there* and *there*."

"Nonsense. It's a shadow—dye off the lashes or something." She laughed, looking aside.

"I'll try if it comes off, shall I?" said Charles obligingly. "Shut your eyes again tight."

She did, and he tried. It did not come off, so he tried again.

"Behave, please," said Violet, catching him by the tie. "You have not congratulated me on having such a pretty cousin."

"You're a lot prettier," said he.

"Charles! Your immortal soul, my dear. This is a question of fact."

"I'm thinking of the fact,—glaring fact, I call it." The expression of his eyes bent on her was perfectly fatuous, long past criticism obviously.

"Ask anyone in the hotel what they think," he said—"and Jones."

"And if everyone,—and Jones,—agrees with me?"

"I shall be sorry for 'em. It wouldn't change my opinion for a moment."

Mr. Shovell's ensuing remarks were all silly ones, really not worth the setting down. Violet's replies were a trifle

cleverer, but not much, since he distracted her. Hers were intended to be bracing, probably; but Charles had lost an evening, and was inclined to make her pay for excluding him.

"You will have to be respectable soon," she reminded him, resting a rather nervous hand against his chest. "The day after to-morrow we shall be in London: chokers and chimney-pots,—calls and card-cases. Serious business of life again. You will have to interview plumbers, probably,—and go to the office. I shall have to have my hair done,—and yours cut. Reflect!"

Charles reflected, looking at her steadily.

"Lisette told me a lot of things," pursued Violet dubiously. "It's bothering a little. I really want your opinion,—though whether it's worth having to-night—What do you think about her, seriously speaking?"

"Her aunt should have taught her not to swear."

"Yes," Violet agreed. "But she's better than she used to be—ever so much. It is only on the subject of Honoria she lets fly,—and I hardly wonder. When those two get together, brimstone simply sputters out. Nobody ever stopped them in youth, you know; and it's how they're made. . . . They did it once in our dining-room in Harley Street,—Father was rather interested. He called it an hysterical symptom, and said they should have buckets of cold water at intervals, like cats. . . . Mother laughed, I remember,—it's Ingestre, probably. Lisette is rather like a cat; I told her so. Don't you like her when she wrinkles up her nose?"

"Oh yes," he said. "I didn't notice much."

"Then you wasted your opportunities——"

"Sorry: I won't any longer," said Mr. Shovell, very promptly; and for the next few minutes he did not.

"No man *ever* treated me like this before," said Mrs. Shovell plaintively at last.

"Didn't they? Quite sure? Not Ford and the other johnnies who used to admire you so?"

"Certainly not. Poor Mr. Ford! You make me blush, Charles." She did blush a little, and Charles made her still more. She had to clutch at his tie again, and even then he kissed the wrist of the hand.

"You are not behaving," said Violet. "I am sorry, but it is the case. You are not at all what I thought you. I am trying, against odds, to talk sense this evening. People always go to their husbands for advice. I have read that in ever so many books. Even Mother does at times, and she constantly asks for information. Suppose I really needed help at this moment,—a lot of good you'd be."

Charles merely gazed at her, not quite throttled, and quite unashamed.

"You behaved a great deal more nicely at Ingestre Hall," said Violet. "Something like a gentleman, if I remember right. Do you remember our arrival there,—ages ago? Oh dear, how many ages? We were quite proper and dignified, both of us. I was dreadfully shy,—and you were afraid of me. Just a little bit, weren't you?"

Still no answer, though his intent eyes smiled.

"Yes, you still were in the train," she determined. "But it's much worse to suffer from shyness,—much. . . . Oh, Charles! Suppose we had remained at the Hall, with the owls at night in the terrible old trees,—and had rain all the time,—and wind——"

"Suppose I had had small-pox," interrupted Charles, "and you had married another man."

"I shouldn't have married any other,—I think."

"You'd only have flirted with 'em, eh?"

"No, I never flirt. I am surprised at you, Charles, saying such a thing to my face! You are certainly not yourself this evening. . . . But it *has* been nice here, hasn't it? We were a *little* clever to come? Nothing, somehow," said Violet, looking rather wistfully at the light, "can really spoil it now."

"I'd chuck her out if she did," said Charles instantly.

"Oh yes, I should, I can tell you. Bag and baggage, on the nail."

"She has no baggage, poor little thing," said Violet. "She really hasn't anything; she said so. She said I have it all. Please don't be such a brutal boy, it hurts my ears. . . . Oh, Charles, no! There are limits, dearest, really. A girl must have some feature left her, and be able to mention it without—annoyance. There, calm down. Talk to me about Jones, or anything soothing,—what you like. I will leave Lisette till to-morrow,—altogether, shall I? Very well."

She retired soon after, and sat motionless for a long time on her bed before she undressed. Charles had never been quite like that before,—not quite. It was a little perplexing and disturbing to her mind, when they had settled into steady habits as she considered,—almost as if he had drunk something, which really she was quite certain he had not.

She did not, among possible elements of intoxication, in a quiet domestic atmosphere, think of Felicia,—but that was because she was very sure of Charles. Yet Lisette, as a fact, was to blame. Her presence had proved "upsetting" a trifle to Mr. Shovell, even as his experienced mother-in-law had hinted in her letter: but it was not in any way of which Eveleen Ashwin, when she wrote those words, had dreamed. No one, perhaps, would have been more vexed than Lady Ashwin, if she had been able to witness the exact effects on Charles that Lisette's awakening presence had actually produced.

IV

By the sobering light of day, Charles had Felicia's history, such as it was. Violet had really made out something of the state of things from the girl's obscure and broken account, though she suspected at various points

that she was being evaded, or even flatly deceived. Lisette hardly could speak the truth, such had been her upbringing. The whole truth, clearly presented, would have constituted a mental and moral effort quite beyond her. But she had the advantage, with Violet, of not feeling she was being patronized or looked down upon, both of which attitudes made her take the offensive—with an Addenbroke, the intolerably offensive—instantly. She was talking to a girl and an equal, one of her clan, whom she could even patronize herself, as her junior, if need arose. Need had not arisen; she did not tease much, though she tired Violet greatly by repeating things, or presenting the same thing under different and incompatible aspects. However, by putting together the most probable-sounding statements, elicited others by adroit inquiry, and employing her sympathetic fancy to fill the chinks, she did arrive at something like a connected story, though she got small reassurance from it in its finished form.

The first-hand evidence, as has been indicated, was far too chaotic, passionate, and prejudiced, to be set down as related. Violet herself, having thought it over during the watches of the night, summarized it the next day for Charles, always with cautious reservations, as became an Ashwin, in a matter where the psychology of the actors and reporters went for so much. She had no doubt, at least, where to lay the blame.

"It is perfectly—perfectly mad of those women," she said hopelessly. "I mean, the two at Torquay; mad whichever way you look at it, whether they are right in their deductions or wrong. The only way would have been to pet and pat and soothe her, very gently, and prevent at all hazards her going off like this on her own. Instead of that, they have simply goaded her to renounce them dramatically,—a beautiful, dust-shaking scene, dear Charles,—and now her pride is set in the way of her returning. I doubt,—I very much doubt," said Violet, walking about the room, "if either of those women,—

even with unexpected angels to whisper promptings to them, like the goodiest books of our earliest years,—will ever get her back again. Cousin Agnes is merely a fool, of course,—but Honoria!—oh, I should like to *tell* her what I think!”

Charles asked what the quarrel had been. Violet tried to put it straight in her own mind for him.

“It was a sudden idea,—which is the bane of Felicias. She thought she hated her school at Southampton, which really had been marvelously tolerant, if all she says about her proceedings there is true. She taught drawing chiefly,—Ledger, her father’s master, taught her for love,—a really great old man; so she started right, however she has played with it since. But I believe she is very clever at it when she likes, and cares for it certainly. She liked the work with the girls, but she imagined she was being put upon about some trifle quite beneath attention, and instantly found she would like a change. It struck her it would be a good change to go abroad; and since she wanted to shock her aunt at all costs, she proposed Paris. All that is very simple, so far,—it is just Lisette.”

“Well?” said Charles, as she stopped, her brow lifting into its lines of care.

“Well,—fortune favored her strangely. The visiting master for modern languages,—French from Brussels, she says, which implies Belgian,—told her of a post. He had a friend who had one to offer,—a friend in Paris, Charles; just what she wanted. He showed her a printed paragraph about it from an English paper: one child to manage, good conditions, good salary. She was much attracted, and felt worse-used by the Southampton school than ever.”

“Well?” he queried again, after an interval.

“Sorry, dear,” she said quickly. “I suppose I haven’t finished thinking myself, though I thought I had. . . . Of course, you see the uncertainty. No people of sense would take it on a vague recommendation like that.

Morally, Cousin Agnes was perfectly right to sniff at her, and tell her to be good and happy where she was, and Honoria to call her (as I suppose she did) an infernal fool. *My opinion on the subject,*" said Violet, pulling out a little curl, as was her habit when distracted in mind, "is identical, evidently, with theirs. Lisette should be,—and she is one. But my reason would have told me not to express the opinion,—but to flatter Lisette,—fondle her,—bribe her with gold if necessary, to drop the idea of Paris, and to stay at home. Yes, even to drop the Southampton school, since she was feeling melodramatic and oppressed there, and to take a walking-tour with me on Dartmoor or some healthy place, if I had been her sister, which I'm not."

"Which fortunately you are not," said Charles, "since you can talk for two minutes on end without offending decent people."

"Yes," she sighed. "Profanity is required, though, all the same: a nice steady *man's* profanity, Charles. I should like Father to go down to Torquay, and swear at them a little,—I never heard him, but he is probably good at it, since they all practice on the nurses,—and *force* that pair of canting females to take her back. But as it is——"

"Can't you tell your father?"

"I must talk to Mother first."

"Why, V.?" inquired Charles. Turning from him, she gripped the hands she had clasped behind her.

"*No!* because it is so much the hardest thing to do. I am not a Puritan donkey to that degree. But because—because the girls are Mother's business; she ought to do it. She would have a right to be offended if I went to Father under the rose. And I don't want to offend my Mother, Charles, more than necessary."

"Meaning she'd make it nasty for you if you did."

"She would, of course: but that's not all I mean." She walked about a little, restlessly, as she reflected. "There is such a thing as justice,—hard as it often is to see. I am

not inclined to do justice to Mother; she makes Father suffer so. I do *not* love her—often I almost hate. But she has a good side,—she is very strong on her family, very loyal to her stock. She is house-proud in that sense, and to act against her inclinations, for the honor of her house, is the only way I can see her being unselfish. I believe she could not let Lisette, being an Ingestre grandchild, cut her throat like this, or risk cutting her throat, if she heard the whole case properly stated. I shall rest heavily on that side of things when I see her. I shall not write: letters put Mother off. It must be *viva voce*,—I think I can do it,—I am going to try; as soon as ever we arrive to-morrow I shall go straight and do it from the train. Do *not* throw cold water, darling, or my nerve will go. I have to plead before a judge that doesn't like me, and won't ever believe I am disinterested,—and that is hard."

Violet had never before, to her husband's ears, stated the home situation so openly and undisguisedly as this. Charles was more than a little interested, especially since in the future it touched him too.

"Why should I throw cold water?" he asked, lazily amused at her intensity. "I am not the least inclined to, I assure you."

"Because it is so deadly important,—and I thought you might think I was wasting time."

"You don't very often do that, ducky. Rather the other way."

"Yes, I do, quite often enough. I have wasted weeks of heaven here. It is time, quite time, I found a war-path again. Did you know I was the least bit pugnacious?" She lifted a brow at him.

"I could guess it," he answered serenely. "Go on. Why is it so supremely important to do something striking with all speed?"

"Why, because——" she paused. "I thought you saw. Didn't I make that part clear enough? Coward!" She

bit her lip. "That is because it is the worryngest, and so I shirked it."

"Worry away," said Charles, "but worry aloud."

"Oh," said Violet, impressed. "What a nice friendly way to put it, Mr. Shovell. Thank you." She offered him a finger, which she then withdrew. "What on earth am I to say about it? It is all so vague. I may be so ridiculously wrong to feel frightened."

"Frightened?" he said quickly. "What about?"

"For her. She is so very pretty. And a man proposing it—just in the nick of time for her. And the good salary,—can't you see?"

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Charles, "seeing" then for the first time. He sat up, staring at her.

"I have no fear," said Violet, gazing oddly back at him, "about Mother failing to take that point up, promptly. She will jump at it, without a doubt. She may even see it is strongly advisable for somebody to take steps. The question is, if she will act herself. Well now,—Felicia is coming to London,—to stay, as she says, in rooms. She is very poor, and hates rooms in that sense, and she loves luxury and lovely things. Mother can easily take her in, at least till she has investigated the post proposed. It's nonsense her saying she can't. Mother can't pretend she has not a place for Lisette now I am gone. It strikes me as an obvious first step on her part,—doesn't it you, Charles?"

"Am I to encourage?" inquired Mr. Shovell. "Yes."

"It is a bribe to Felicia," proceeded Violet. "She wants to be invited by Mother,—you heard. Our house is a particularly nice one, with two motors; and the food is good."

"But won't Lady Ashwin and Miss Addenbroke quarrel instantly?" asked Charles, "and bring the house about your father's ears?"

"Instantly," said Violet earnestly. "I rather count upon that. They will keep one another up to the mark. It will distract both their attentions from other things."

Mother may easily be bored by this time, always going out alone, and Ingestres understand one another's natures. You remember their fighting amused Mother before. I never succeeded in amusing Mother," said Violet, "but I think Felicia may. And Father will like a third at dinner for a change, and someone deliciously nice to look at, like Lisette. He appreciates that immensely. I am not *jealous* of Lisette, talking to Father at dinner instead of me, the least."

"That's what I was noticing," said Charles, "with some surprise. It's an awfully nice plan, darling, quite worthy of you. Will it work?"

"Probably not," said Violet. "But you are not discouraging me, only sitting by in approbation while I talk. . . . We couldn't have Lisette, dear, could we?" It was the lightest, oddest little suggestion, tacked on to the other well-elaborated proposal.

"No," thundered Charles without warning.

"Very well,—be calm. I said we couldn't, and there isn't a room. The workmen haven't nearly done, since Mother has been looking after them. They saw by Mother's eye that they needn't really get my house ready in time, whatever Father said about the matter. I quite expected it, and I am quite prepared. Disgustingly uncomfortable you will be," said Violet, her affectionate eyes on Charles. "Nothing particular to eat, and hammering everywhere for weeks." She had abandoned Felicia's affair for a moment at a temptation which brides may excuse.

"Don't let's go home," said Charles, with a bright thought.

"We must, because I have packed the books," said Violet. "I spent a lot of time over it, and my time is never wasted. Besides, I have got to chaperon Lisette."

"You mean we're taking her with us?" said Charles, with the emphasis of disgust.

"We are, and you are paying for her ticket. She hasn't

got a sou, that girl," said Violet. "That is the other horrid complication. Honoria offered her her journey-money, it appears, and she threw it at her head. She would, of course—I quite believe it. She has nothing but her last term's salary, and she won't tell me how much that is."

"Well, your mother will rise to that, won't she?" said Charles. "You said she did before."

"Yes, in all probability she will. If she goes, she must have money," declared Violet. "At the worst, I shall insist on that."

"Have you seen the correspondence?" Charles asked presently. He observed Violet seemed to take the thing to heart, and he was pleasant as usual.

"No,—and she won't give up the address, or even the advertisement, though she declares she has both, and letters. . . . She may to Mother," said Violet, her sensitive brows working.

"When does the new salary start—in October?"

"In August," said Violet, looking down.

"Oh, that's not so long to tide over," said Charles cheerfully. She rather wondered if he took the point of the extreme unlikelihood of a good post falling vacant in August, in Paris. But she said no more to him then, thinking perhaps he had been instructed sufficiently in Felicia's private affairs. She had given him at least a dose of facts, and stored the comments for her mother. She had not mentioned to Lisette that she would confide in him, but she nursed a curious conviction that Lisette, for all her impudent remarks, knew the terms they were on together well enough. It was the kind of thing her eager animal senses and beautiful vacant eyes grasped straightway, without the need of argument or attention.

During the interval of this conversation, Lisette was out. She went out into the town, saying, with a defiant lift of chin, that she had a call to pay on some people her father had known there, who used to be decent. She had

referred several times, in her moments of involuntary confidence, to her father and his evidently Bohemian circle, and her delightful life among them as half plaything, half pupil; and as there was a considerable artist colony resident in this little coast town, the excuse seemed the more probable to Mrs. Shovell's ears, and she had not given a second thought to it. She was glad, if she thought at all, that Lisette had found other friends who might advise her, for she had plenty of business herself on this her last day. To be free of Lisette's constant demands, not to mention her distracting personality, was rather a blessing. Violet did all her own packing, and most of her husband's; and then, late in the morning, having certain farewells to make and presents to buy, she went down herself to the lower town. Thence she diverted to the shore, for she had abstracted a really disgraceful cap of Charles', which she intended to bury in his absence to avoid all possibility of his insisting on wearing it again.

Having accomplished the obsequies with her usual neat decision, she looked up, and discovered she was being observed by a casual gentleman of an ordinary appearance; who, on a second look, discovered himself to be Marmaduke Jones. As Mr. Jones liked a joke, Violet shared the mild joke of Charles' buried cap with him; and then, since it occurred to her she had not seen much of him lately, she let him walk beside her on the beach a little, and talk; or rather, as usual, she talked to him.

"We *shall* be sorry to go," said Violet,—and commonplace remarks like that. Not having Charles at hand to stimulate her, she sank to Jones' level, and let her conversational credit slide.

"I've got to go to London too," said Jones, when several nothings had been exchanged.

"Without prejudice, I hope, to Paris later on," said Violet.

"Oh, I shall get there, I expect," he said, his look softening. "It's only bits of things I have to do,—rather a slack

time. Later on, I could get a fellow to take my job, if necessary." Except through Charles, Violet knew nothing about his charitable interests. He had not talked to her about the "show" for reasons she suspected. It was concerned with things too sad and serious, in Jones' view, to be forced on the notice of the youth, innocence and ease she represented. Marmaduke's conception of young womanhood,—ladyhood rather,—was as ordinary as the rest of him, or had been hitherto. Certain phrases Violet had dropped had shaken it a little. But as he had little hope of knowing her, he had hardly allowed himself to be curious. He simply, in his unassuming manner, enjoyed her society.

After another pleasant period of nothings:

"I hope you didn't mind my friend last night," said Mrs. Shovell. "She is rather sudden, but she means no harm. She is really a most interesting girl."

"Oh yes," said Jones, at once cast down. Presently he ventured—"Is she staying long?"

Violet told him. "She leaves when we do,—comes with us to London. I am escorting her, you know." She smiled demurely, as such a newly-established chaperon should.

"Oh yes," said Jones again, accepting it. He did not smile, however. "She's alone then, is she?" He thought of venturing on the title, and decided not.

"Very much alone. Had you doubted it?"

The young man did not answer for a moment. As she turned her eyes to him, he blushed, quite visibly.

"I thought there might be someone with her," he said awkwardly; "that's all."

Violet waited, weighing him. He was looking straight in front of him along the beach. He had a colorless manner, as Charles said, but not enough so to disguise the discomfort he felt.

"Had you seen her with anybody?" she asked mildly.

"Oh,—I suppose she had picked up a friend."

"Down here? This morning?" He nodded to each

before she added, "Man or woman?" But she knew what the answer would be before he spoke. It seemed so extraordinarily unlikely, on the face of things, that Lisette Addenbroke would pick up a lady friend on the beach.

"She knows some friends of her father's here," said Violet, in duty bound.

He assented in exactly the same formula as before. Natural sincerity, and an almost panic-stricken wish to reassure her, were striving in every phrase he uttered. He would have given much, now that they had been produced, to sweep away those little lines of apprehension from her brow. It was too young a brow, he thought, to bear them. He hated himself when he saw them there; but it was not in his nature to do otherwise. When two sincere spirits meet, there is little hope of trifling between them.

They pursued their way in silence, he hardly daring to do more than glance at her from time to time, seek for impossible subjects of diversion, the first word of which would not pass his lips, and reproach himself for clouding her last day amid such scenes. He looked far more at the familiar view than at her, but he knew every detail about her notwithstanding. He even noticed how, absent and pensive as she was, she avoided the sand-castles and sand-gardens of innumerable children, with exquisite care, in walking; for they were on the more populous portion of the beach to-day. Jones would have known beforehand she would do that,—a person so naturally respectful to all forms of thought, however unfinished, in others. Her own, he had no doubt, were finished as admirably as herself.

Impressions, rather than thoughts, flashed through Violet's mind, one after another, concerning this phantom stranger and Lisette. She had, of course, to be prepared for lying at any point; that, in dealing with an Addenbroke, she recognized. The girl's excuse of acquaintance in the town might be true or false,—Mr. Jones evidently

thought the latter. Why?—The *why* must wait. For the moment, it was open to her to suppose that Lisette's artist-father's friend was so seedy, flashy, or eccentrically-garbed as to mislead the mere "man in the street" that Jones represented—according to Charles. That constituted the first group of Violet's impressions,—the preliminary.

Next, it was more than possible a quite casual man should address Lisette, and more than probable she would answer him affably if he did. Mr. Jones, unacquainted with the Addenbroke psychology, and still conceiving Lisette as a lady of title, would in this case pass at the wrong moment, and misunderstand the encounter. This thought was almost humorous, really: though Violet's anxious brow did not change.

Next, on the presumption that it was a particular man,—which must be faced,—he might have followed her uninvited, and she might know how to deal with him if he did. Probably Lisette had some unexpected talents in such situations, and would be far less perturbed in dealing with unpleasant characters than Violet was in simply thinking about it. This thought was not humorous, but it was a way of escape,—one of the ways. There were heaps of chances still, heaps: for all the possibility of ill grew blacker.

Then, at the point of stress, she remembered herself to have seen a man in the girl's track that first night,—a dark-looking man, with an air her quick sight and critical sense had condemned on instinct before he vanished again. And just there in her thoughts, Violet swept aside the flattering chances, and turning mentally, looked straight in the face of that improbable evil for a minute or two,—minutes during which Jones' unseeing eye perceived her clench her fine bare hands. He was not consciously projecting his thoughts to her,—he would willingly have spared her any hint of them,—but he saw the mental strain reach its climax in that bracing movement, and, more

anxious than she, he wondered what was in store for him. As he wondered Violet turned.

"Mr. Jones," she said, her soft tone shaken a little, "nothing at all excuses me in what I am going to say. It is eccentric, to say the least. I am ashamed of it beforehand. Could you, if quite necessary for a friend's peace of mind, get to Paris during August—a disgusting month—instead of October, a delightful one?"

"A friend?" said Jones surprised. "Oh yes." The answer came with promptitude and simplicity.

"It would be simply a case of charity," said Violet, her faint shy color showing, though she looked at him frankly; "serving your neighbor. I know you are very good at that, through Charles."

"Neighbor?" he queried. It seemed to express less to him than "friend."

"Neighbor through the wall," said Violet; "and on a balcony with a particularly heavenly view. And neighbor at table for a fortnight," she added smiling, "except last night."

"For you?" said Jones quickly.

"For me. It is wild to propose it; especially here and now, and I cannot think my husband would approve of my impetuosity. Charles says I am impetuous. But I inherit it from a violently hasty father, if I may offer that as an excuse. It may be the last time I shall see you in private,—and it is not a thing that bears much talking, anyhow. It is all in the air,—absurd, very likely. But I have to think of the worst that can be. It is better, in life." She looked past him, out to sea, her delicate throat working.

"It's best to be on the safe side," Jones translated mechanically, marveling at her. She had evidently reached his point of speculation,—must have done so in that short time. That was what she termed impetuosity, doubtless; that hawk-like flight of thought.

"Only I *do* apologize," added Violet with fervor, turning, "in this instance."

"Don't, please," said Jones, perturbed. "Of course, I'll do anything I can: that's what I'm good for. I've nothing to keep me, really,—nothing that can't be shelved. I only pick up things,—anything going,—that's the way I live. One thing's as good as another."

Having tried this half-dozen of little phrases, and finding that none of the common idioms satisfied his feelings in the least, he snatched at facts.

"August can be managed, anyhow," he said with decision. "What date?"

"I should have to let you know. Could you really get off again in August? How wonderful of you. Will you give me your address?"

He wrote it on his card, stopping an instant on the strand. She stopped too at his side. He longed as he wrote to step further into intimacy, to tell her that he knew her father's name,—Shovell had evidently not mentioned that,—anything to calm the childish agitation at doing an unheard-of thing that he perceived. But he was unable to summon further courage than was necessary to meet and satisfy her demands as a matter of course, preserving his most ordinary aspect to reassure her: as though such as she asked these things of Joneses every day. That he could do, and he did.

"May I explain later?" she asked shyly. "And will you take it from me I will not bother you unless I really must? I trust—I do trust—I shall not have to. I am probably fussing like a fool about it,—women do."

"But you'll write?" said Jones. Whether or no she had to, he meant.

"I will—or Charles, I promise. We shall not spare you directions, if you undertake our affairs, you may be sure. We both love words so much. You have suffered from that, haven't you?" She laughed a little to his face, which seemed vaguely disappointed.

After an interval, as he did not speak—"Perhaps you will come and see me," she added in pure kindness, "some time or other, in town."

Jones' face cleared again a little, but he explained he did not live in town. He lived down in Surrey,—the Leatherhead district,—and only came up to his office three times in the week.

"Well, one of those times," said Violet. "After luncheon; will you try? Unless I go to lunch with Charles, I shall be lonely. He told you, didn't he, where we live?"

"Yes, he mentioned it," said Jones.

"You see," she said, seeking to make him easier, as they walked slowly on again, "I don't feel as if I want to lose anything belonging to all this." Her eyes traveled past him to the sea again. "It has been an ordinary summer holiday to you and the rest,—to us it has been different. You can afford to forget it, having others of the same kind to come, I hope. But ours—Charles' and mine—will never come again."

She renounced her lease of the perfect paradise with that steady look past him, had he been able to read. He did not reach so far, he merely rose to the sentiment of the words with a nod and his pleasant ordinary smile. Jones, just past the barrier of the thirties, could look on the little lovers' paradise with benevolence, and what is more, with generosity. It had been a perfectly genuine daily joy to him to see her happiness.

"You have been really fearfully kind," said Violet, after a pause of wondering what next to say. "We should not have seen half what we have without your help. You have made about half our memories, Mr. Jones."

He murmured something which he trusted would fill the pause. Mrs. Shovell's way of talking always charmed him, particularly the way she spared him any but the most obvious responses. If he did not answer, she went straight on.

"I suppose you will be motoring home, won't you?" she proceeded. Any of Jones' girls at the hotel would have thought she was "fishing" by the question: but Jones would have gratified his girls, for he did not "rise,"

or propose instantly to drive the party of three to London, the following day, in his car. It seemed he was sending the motor by the man, and returning himself to London in the train,—he had not yet settled which train. Perhaps he had not looked it up,—or made sufficient inquiries.

However, before he could even start on preliminary inquiries with the lady at his side, she was suddenly overcome by the recollection of a serious omission in her morning's errands, which had instantly to be remedied. She had cream to order,—pounds of cream,—to satisfy her voracious relatives at home. Not that they had asked for it, Mr. Jones should understand, but people always expected such attentions when their friends traveled in the West country, and almost invariably liked cream best, and quite invariably looked it in the mouth to see if it was fresh on arrival. She explained all this in a flight of words to Jones, and went, also in a flight, and an extremely youthful one, up the slope of shallow steps to the Parade. All the languor and vagueness that had been marked on her arrival in that health resort had vanished, and her activity of body and buoyancy of mind were equally—and, to the spinsters, shamelessly—exhibited.

"Twenty and a largish half," Jones remembered as he looked after her, slowly lighting a cigarette, before he proceeded to turn over some of the startling elements in their late conversation. It certainly was not extremely old.

v

Nothing remarkable occurred on the journey to London, until quite the end: except, of course, Mr. Jones turning up in his car at the junction, and having finally decided upon that train,—which was delightful. They had half an hour at the junction, which was, however, a beautiful place to wait: and Charles and Miss Addenbroke had been fighting all the way. So Violet explained to Jones, when

he joined her in a bay of the platform, where she was sitting alone. The general result of these conditions seemed to be that she had accepted all Charles' most cherished possessions on her knee, and sat nursing them pensively, while the other two finished their quarrel in peace, out of her hearing.

Violet was conscious of an inclination to sit alone to-day, and could have dispensed with Jones' society, though she showed no sign of objecting to it. She was in a mood for solitude, partly because she had not yet finished thinking, partly because she was frankly nervous of the prospective interview with her mother. Charles had noticed her state of mind, but beyond saving her all trouble at departure and on the road, he did not tease her with inquiry, and spent his ingenuity in distracting Felicia's attention: which could be most readily done by contradicting her. The dialogue during the first hour of the journey had a nursery flavor,—the flavor of a fractious nursery,—in consequence. In the process, Charles and Lisette became rapidly better friends: and their snapping was broken from time to time by bursts of involuntary laughter, at least on the part of the gentleman.

Jones, having interviewed his chauffeur, and handed over the car and all his luggage to his charge, was able to sit by Mrs. Shovell with free hands and mind at ease: a most enviable state to a lady so loaded with the burdens, tangible and otherwise, of her party. Down the vista of the country platform, her friend and her husband were happily engaged, face to face, with their noses rather near together, and their hands behind.

"She objects to being looked after," Violet explained this attitude. "I have quite resigned my pretensions, at the earliest stage, being chaffed really to rags. He will not. He and I are separating at Paddington—not for good—and he wants her to let him drive her to her place. He wants to look at it, you know: and since he acted rather badly, she was on to him. I think he had better leave it

now, and let her go to her boarding-house for to-night. I hope to fetch her home to-morrow. I have the address, and it looks quite a nice one." She handed the address to her companion as she spoke.

"That's all right," he said, handing it back. "I know the place."

"Oh, how nice of you," said Violet. "Thanks. Shall I go and stop them now, before she quite boxes his ears? Charles would never forgive that, you know, because he thinks so much of his position with the porters."

"Oh, I shouldn't bother," said Jones, glancing passingly at the pair. "He's laughing now."

"Lisette is funny at times," said Violet, and settled back on her seat. Since she seemed to wish to be silent, Jones was silent too.

"The train's late, isn't it?" she said presently, stirring from her dream.

"Not signaled yet," said Jones. "This one's often late. Shall I put those down?" He alluded to the ungainly collection of properties upon her knee. Her arms were clasped about her knees, as though protecting them.

"They are so fearfully precious," said Violet, looking them thoughtfully over, without unclasping her hands. "There's my myrtle cutting: and Charles' best stick, and his worst cap, the same I buried yesterday, which he resurrected this morning: not the least that he could wear it now, but to be a lesson to me: it certainly will be one. And there's the cream, more precious than words; and the only one of his sea-anemones that didn't die horribly, which he is taking for his step-sister's husband's aquarium, if it will be kind enough to survive in a pickle-jar, which it won't——"

"Well," said Jones, who found the list, in combination with her abstracted face and mechanical tone, amusing.

"I think that's all: except my pearls; which hardly signify,—being false," said Mrs. Shovell sadly.

"I—say!" exclaimed Jones.

"Well, haven't a dozen people told you so, in confidence, since we came?"

"That's not what I mean," he said, coloring slightly. "What I mean is,—it's beastly cheek of me, Mrs. Shovell,—wouldn't they be better on?"

"On?" said Violet, wondering. "On me?—Oh, do you think I am careless of my treasures, Mr. Jones?"

"It's beastly cheek," he repeated doggedly. "But really, I often wondered why you showed them, in a place like that. Mixed lot of people—public rooms—it's not safe." He seemed really to be repeating a conviction. "You couldn't feel safe," he concluded.

"But I did!" she cried. "That was why." As he did not speak, looking puzzled, she resolved to explain. "It's rather childish," she admitted, "when I think. But it was so odd your saying that, I suppose it brought the truth out unaware. That was why I brought them with me, for safety,—mine, not theirs. Because I was plunging into a dark unknown, and nervous of goodness knew what coming upon me,—it was security and home to feel them. It was like his fingers round my neck."

"Oh yes," said Jones, in his usual quiet formula; but his eyes moved down the platform.

"Not *his*," cried the girl, swift to catch the implication, the color sweeping across her face. "Oh, careless that I am,—how could you think it!—I meant my father, his protection. I had never been cut off from it in life before. I have been far, far too well cared for, really,—I had never thought what it would be. His pearls stood for his presence to his daughter's silly mind,—that is simply all I mean. It was really—only at the first—I wanted it."

Jones muttered something, probably an apology, and there was a pause. She was biting her lip, fighting the shame and shyness he had aroused; but for all that shame, she had answered freely and fully: they were striding into intimacy by some freak of fate. He was careful not

to glance in her direction till she moved suddenly, sought her keys, unlocked her casket with rapid, decided hands, and drew out the string he had seen so often round her neck.

As soon as she did so, Marmaduke sat up, and glanced swiftly along the platform in both directions.

"It's quite all right," she said, amused at his agitation. "I am going to take your advice, that's all. It's simply common-sense, in a train, if I had thought. I expect motor-traveling makes one careless of things like that. Look," she added softly. "Do you care to see them near?"

Jones had seen the pearls near often enough; but he did not refuse to see them again, thus laid across her fingers. It was certainly easier to examine them so than in the more conspicuous post they had occupied nightly, at the hotel. He knew something about pearls, too, as was clear: more than Violet did, for she confided to him that she had never been able, owing to her father's unfortunate habit of being frivolous in the wrong places, to get at their real value. She believed he had insured them, that was all. It was on the question of the insurance that she betrayed to Jones that her surmise of their value was about half the sum that must actually have been given for them: for they struck him as remarkable both in form and color, and admirably matched. He was only relieved when she stopped sifting them through her fingers, every touch of which was a caress, and clasped them round her neck. Needing both hands for the operation, she requested her neighbor to uphold the erection on her knee, which Marmaduke did attentively.

"Aren't you going to lock it up again?" he inquired after a period, when she had tucked the pearls out of sight inside her collar, and resumed the guard of Charles' treasures.

"Oh yes,—of course," said Violet. "Thanks. I am afraid," she added naively, "that I am not showing off extremely well this morning. I seem to need looking after

even more than Lisette. It doesn't promise particularly well for Charles' future, does it?"

"Oh, when you're thinking," said Jones.

"How did you know I was thinking?" she demanded; and added before he could reply, "He would say it was no excuse."

"Your father?" asked Jones.

"My father. He is a frightfully severe critic in things like that. He never sees why you should let little things go, you know, in turning over big ones. His own net is big enough—and fine enough—for all."

She spoke very thoughtfully, and stopped again.

"Little things" were her priceless jewels, Jones perceived; "big things" were the business of that girl down the platform, jesting with her husband. Jones took the liberty to be convinced that she was still tormenting herself about that girl, because of the direction of her eyes. She had probably been worrying over that ugly affair ever since she had met him the preceding day, and he had blurted out, like the fool he was, the suspicion he could not conceal. Once more he longed with all his heart to disabuse her of the unnatural anxiety, but did not see in conscience how he could. Each glimpse of Lisette in the distance was enough to revive it in himself, and to revive the face and form of the man he had seen at her side. He had not seen him since, though he had watched with care; and he had certainly not come up by the local train, though he might, of course, be in the one that was coming from Penzance. It was entirely,—almost entirely,—for the purpose of examining that train in turn that he had dropped his car at the junction; for it was better, Jones continued to consider, to be "on the safe side." And the "safe side" would not admit the presence of a man like that in a train that held these two girls. He was not working on nothing, on air as she called it, had she known. On the business side of his life he had had sufficient experience of such men and their feminine equivalents to test

and justify his first prejudice. He might be wrong, and he wished to be, but he refused to admit his suspicion was foolish, still less hers. He tried to put trouble, the trouble she shared, away from him during this interval of their solitude together, and to look on the cheerful side of life; but though he found things to say, and even jested, he could not turn her thoughts from it, nor his. Their brains were, as it were, netted in abstraction; and when the white puff of distant steam proclaimed the train's approach he knew very well that he had failed.

Nevertheless, he was enabled to extract a special satisfaction from even that brief interview,—a point over which he had passed too carelessly in reckoning out her chances of relief. The satisfaction lay in the thought of the father of whom she had spoken with such a manner of innocent devotion, while they debated over the pearls. Jones knew something about Sir Claude Ashwin, one of the public men who was "all right" according to his simple phrase; who lent a hand to the things that mattered and made no fuss about it; giving here money and there brains where each was most urgently required, and never mistaking the different requirements. In his family ties, it seemed, he was "all right" as well; and it was no more than becoming that a girl like this should have a good man at hand to guard her—two men, that is, of course,—but a man of weight as well as her light-hearted husband. Two, in the case, was not too many by any means.

Not that Charles was thoughtless of her: Jones marked with pleasure his attentions by the way. He was a thoroughly nice fellow, Shovell,—courteous and pleasant to all. They all traveled in one carriage finally, of course,—Charles making no objection, since Lisette already spoiled the *tête-à-tête*. It was even a slight improvement, from Charles' point of view, to have Jones; and certainly, by varying the possible couples, made things livelier. Not to mention that Jones really was so entirely unobjection-

able that a fellow could even ignore him completely if necessary.

A fellow did so, on more occasions than one, and Jones had a most perfect air of not observing the private telegraph in the compartment. Lisette, who appreciated rapid change of scene, chattered like a magpie, and was quite capable of diverting the whole party single-handed, when such was her good pleasure. It was a liberal entertainment to look at her, indeed; and except during the period, after a large lunch, when the young lady went to sleep, nobody was dull.

During that period, they were quiet of necessity; the more quiet by contrast. Charles, having no companion, or at least no adversary left, collapsed lazily. Jones, though in doubt, took up a book, which for some time past, owing to circumstances of Lisette, he had not been allowed to read in peace. Reading, it seemed, was an occupation Miss Addenbroke entirely failed to sympathize with or comprehend; drawing was a much more reasonable pastime, but in a train, for obvious causes, drawing is difficult. For these reasons she had remained empty-handed for the most part, and insisted on others doing likewise.

Mrs. Shovell, having leant to tuck a cushion under the sleeping girl, took from her slackened fingers her half-smoked cigarette, which threatened to burn her dress, and prepared to finish it herself, very calmly.

"Only half a one," she murmured, in excuse apparently, in Charles' direction. "A pity to waste good things, you know."

Jones also glanced beyond her, to see how Shovell took the proceeding. He had not seen her smoke before—Violet had been very moderate, lately,—and it surprised him a little. In Miss Lisette he had taken it as a matter of course.

"You are ex—ceeding," Charles whispered back. "I shall tell on you at home. I shall have half yours after dinner,—rather."

"Pig," returned his wife simply. She took off her hat at leisure,—it had a long soft feather that was possibly smart, thought Jones, and certainly suitable, both to her and to her dignity as chaperon,—and tossed it by her on the seat. Without it she was again as she had been on the beach every day. She leant back and shut her eyes, smoking in small quick whiffs that looked nervous somehow. It seemed Shovell thought so as well as Jones.

"Perhaps her ladyship'll be out," he murmured, in the same private manner, through his teeth.

"I made an appointment," she returned without stirring or opening her eyes; and Jones saw him laugh.

"Jones is shocked," remarked Charles presently. As she opened her eyes, he added: "Now he's trying to conceal it. His ideal of you is in fragments, really. He does so hate fast women. Personally, he has no vices, have you, Jones?" He put an arm round Violet as he spoke. "Yes," he ordained, as she resisted. "Go to sleep too,—good girl. Follow Lisette there,—you know you had a shocking night."

"I may know," she retorted. "You don't, for obvious reasons,—obvious at the time. No, I have not done smoking. Let go, you—nuisance! Charles——"

After a short inarticulate parley, conveyed in movements of eyes, and brows, and lips, she succumbed to brute force, calmly and steadily exerted upon her, and, settling down of a sudden against him, shut her eyes. Charles remained immovable utterly, the immovability of which strength alone is capable, his blue eyes fixed beyond her, out of the window, until he felt by her steady breathing that she slept. Then he looked down, softly twitched the remainder of the cigarette out of her fingers, and, tossing it through the window, signaled to Jones beyond to pass his book.

Yes, Shovell was careful of her, no doubt of that; all but as careful and gentle as man could desire. Jones, stirring to pass the book, saw, without looking, her atti-

tude of childish confidence and abandonment, and his fingers in her soft hair. He effaced himself again, in equal discretion and contentment presumably, since wedded happiness is a satisfying thing to see. He may even have been having a nap himself behind his book: for during the hour of her sleeping there, had anyone been interested enough to notice, he never turned a page.

VI

At Paddington Station the event of the day, to which all these quite inferior incidents have been leading up, occurred. It was thrilling, though short, for Violet. She had thought out her arguments to her mother nicely by the time the train ran into the terminus, but this simple occurrence upset all her ideas again. This is a trick of fate frequently noticed by those who prepare themselves too completely in advance for life's important junctures. It is as though fate did not approve of such skilful fore-arming, and was jealous. Violet was much vexed and disturbed: so much so that she did not even tell Charles,—at least till she had gone to higher quarters first. The incidents shall be taken in order.

There was the usual confusion on the platform on arriving, and when they were all outside the train they adopted a frequent plan of such parties in a crowd: one group remaining stationary with the smaller baggage, while another went to identify the large. Jones, being free of all such cares, remained with the ladies, choosing to stand behind their sequestered seat in order to riddle the drifting crowds with his watchful eye. At the usual point when courtesy demands it, Mrs. Shovell besought him not to wait, and with a last look all round him he made his farewells. That is, he said three words in one of his formulæ to Violet, lifted his hat to both, and vanished in the skirmishing throng.

"He likes you best," remarked Felicia, in her usual

irresponsible way. "He never looked at me at all while he was speaking. That was because I teased him in the train."

"Nonsense," said Violet absently. "Are you going, dear? Oh, but do wait for Charles. He can't be long."

Charles had the double mission of discovering the boxes—and the carriage Lady Ashwin had sent, as the best substitute for meeting her daughter in person. Thus Violet, all her various small belongings arranged around her, could not venture to leave the post she held, planted on a seat.

"I shan't wait," said Felicia. "I know he means to drive me home when he's settled you. I told him I wouldn't, and I do what I say. Good-bye."

She edged round behind the seat, where Jones had stood, and from that point of vantage put her soft arms round Violet's neck.

"I told you some shocking lies last night," she murmured affectionately. "You are a dear. Just tell Honoria when you see her that I said you were one. Promise?"

She squeezed her cousin. The intense publicity of this dramatic performance was nearly as good as privacy, in fact; for nobody in the press of a station platform,—a place where silent dramas are constantly played,—has time to heed such theatrical incidents. Besides this, they were in a backwater by Charles' choice,—nobody quite near.

"Silly," Violet commented. "Be good, darling, won't you?—and stay at home to-morrow morning. Either Mother or I will come and fetch you for a drive."

"Oh, will you?" said Lisette, evidently pleased. "You promise?"

"I promise faithfully. Have you got the blouse?"

"Of course! Do you think I'd leave it when he made such faces, and it suited me? I've got everything." She still squeezed, rather feverishly,—like a child that is unwilling, all the same, to go; that holds, for protection's sake, while it offers love.

"Kiss me properly," said Violet. "You're not polite, Lisette."

"I don't want to," she said, with a laugh. "You get enough as it is." She pinched Violet's ear, and then kissed her suddenly. "I say what I mean, don't I?" she observed in triumph. "It's the only way." Therewith she slipped off in turn amid the luggage-piles, and Violet shook out her collar and put her hat straight, pensively. She really did not see how her mother could help adoring Lisette, if she could only be brought to look at her seriously. A single drive in her company ought to be quite enough. In the sheer charm of the girl, still lingering about her, she felt reassured. Left solitary on the seat, her lips were smiling, though her eyes still looked anxiously for Charles.

"Oh, Joliffe," she said with real relief, perceiving the familiar face of her father's chauffeur come to the surface in the crowd. "How are you?—all well at home? Did you see Mr. Charles? Is Lady Ashwin there? All right, so long as I catch her. These are Mr. Charles' small things,—that and that and that. I'll keep the jar and the——" She broke short, reckoning up the items. "Have you the little leather case?" she asked. "Did you pick it up? The one with the initials?"

"Yours, Miss?" said Joliffe, who knew her possessions well. "It isn't among these."

"Miss!" laughed Violet. Even while she laughed, her quick eyes were seeking everywhere in vain.

Joliffe, shocked at the breach of etiquette, apologized; by the time he had done so she looked serene.

"Perhaps Mr. Charles took it," the man suggested.

"That's it, of course," she said with decision. "He did, I remember. Thanks, that will be all, then. Go straight to the car, will you? Mr. Charles and I will do the boxes."

Joliffe obeyed, though protesting. Her business was to do nothing, naturally, but sit like a queen in the car; but she was always over-active—Miss Violet—saving trouble to those who were most eager to serve her. From youth

she had paid back the servants, as it were, the trouble her mother deliberately gave. She was gone from Joliffe's side now, before he could look round, and he saw her speeding in Charles' direction.

Later, when she reached the car, her arm in her husband's, she was laughing. It occurred to Joliffe, on seeing this, since he knew something of Mr. Charles' ways, that he had stolen her jewel-case for a joke, that she had suspected the fact promptly, and gone off in a flash like that to charge him with the theft, being at once too dignified and too shy to let the family servant see her husband tease her. Joliffe was very nearly right, too, in this acute surmise, for just such a moment's hope had crossed Violet's mind. The only matter in which he was wrong was that the hope was justified, and the case restored. Her laughter to Charles' face was acting, purely. She turned his mind from suspicion by a jest; and he, as well as the chauffeur, was easily deceived by her manner into supposing all was well.

"Thank Heaven!" was all she thought, breathlessly, when she was alone in the familiar carriage, flying home. Her hand was pressed against her throat, where she could feel her own panting and her father's pearls. Her thanks should have been directed, of course, to Marmaduke Jones; but she forgot the fact, as people will, in a loftier emotion: and Heaven had the benefit.

III

THE GODS DISPOSE

I

IN the interview with her mother, next on the list of the day's doings, Violet failed. It is barely worth while stating that she failed to such as already know Lady Ashwin, but circumstances, as well as character, were against her. The gods, one might say, were against Violet: for dealing with Lady Ashwin brought one near to the immortals unconsciously,—which is not an exclusively flattering comparison for such as can imagine the task of meeting an Olympian in argument.

Yet Violet was in fault as well; for one undoubted reason of her failure was that she went too fast. She did her best not to hurry her mother, for she knew the danger; she interrupted her own careful array of facts constantly, to remark on passing and indifferent things, and answer inconsequent and insignificant diversions. It was like—most oddly like—her interview with Lisette in several ways; though Lisette, even at her most maddening, never quite failed to be childish, “*câline*,” or at least amusing. Lady Ashwin by force of familiarity had long ceased to amuse her daughter. Further than this, the last incident of the day, taking Violet when she was least prepared, had upset her. In one stroke, to lose her jewels and refrain from all effort to recover them were conditions equally against her nature to bear serenely. She was moved: and the results of emotion on the Ashwins was to string up and concentrate their faculties at fever-pitch. Her words came too rapidly, and her reasoning was far too close. It would have taken her mother a week of leisurely study really to take in her points in logical sequence. To take in the generous emotions behind the argument, she blankly refused to do. Eveleen could shut

her will like an iron dike against such warm tides of feeling when she wished. She had frequently found it advisable, both with daughter and husband, to do so.

Yet her general mood was not disagreeable; rather the reverse; nor was she displeased to see Violet, as it appeared, for a change. She was later returning to the house than the hour she had said, of course; Eveleen was rarely punctual to appointment, except, of course, for the things that really mattered. Violet had not expected her to be so, and filled the interval, while she waited in her mother's room, in practicing French conversation with the maid. It was after six, by the watch on her wrist, when Eveleen actually appeared: and Violet, thinking of Charles, was getting anxious. Also, the maid had mentioned that Sir Claude would be in at seven, and she wanted urgently to catch him too before she left. She had a confession for her father's ear.

"Well?" said Lady Ashwin pleasantly. "What's the fuss?"

Ashwins invariably fussed, was her experience; and Violet's request to see her mother privately on her arrival from her wedding journey was attributed naturally to some such cause. Why else should she trouble her parents, indeed?—having a home and a husband to go to now: and a position, thanks to her father's extravagant generosity, which ought to content anybody and encourage independence of her father's house. That was the bearing of the question, broadly.

Violet explained what the fuss was, gradually, as she helped her mother to take off her things, and settle for a rest before the new business of dressing began. Everything needed was lying ready to hand, but since Violet had seen fit to demand the maid's dismissal, she had naturally to help. She gently and clearly jogged her mother's memory as to Lisette's situation, at school and at home; as to her resignation of her post, and her differences with the domestic circle. She stated that the girl had run

away from home, and then paused; leaving an interval for the newly-revised facts to settle: this being the family way to treat Eveleen, who could not follow any argument.

"Let me make you some tea, shall I?" she said, when her mother, comfortably clad in a loose gown, had finally disposed herself on the couch in an alcove of the spacious room.

Lady Ashwin had no objection, and watched her while she produced the materials and did so, with pretty quick ways, which, as Eveleen reflected at leisure, Violet had always used. It was vaguely pleasant to be so served again, for the maid, though deft of hand, had nearly always to be directed. Her daughter's appearance was trim, too, as usual,—no one would have said she arrived from an eight-hours' journey. She had made no change in her traveling-dress, except to toss her feathered hat upon a chair.

"They cut that coat nicely," said Eveleen, as Violet brought her the tea. "Goodson has done nothing decent for me since."

"Extenuated, poor man," said Violet absently. "I am sorry, Mother dear. Anyhow, I shall not trouble him again for long."

"Why has Lisette left home?" said Eveleen, for she had got so far, by this time, in the story successfully. While she drank her tea she picked up some more facts from Violet by degrees.

"Good gracious, what idiots!" was her simple comment on her cousin and Honoria, when hearing of their treatment of the girl. Next, as Violet had foretold, she fixed on the striking feature of the Belgian master of modern languages, and slowly concentrated forces upon it.

"He'll go off with her now, probably," she observed, her fine eyes on Violet's collar, not her face. "I always thought that girl would go to the bad. I told Agnes so, in my last. Agnes had no idea how to handle her, from the first. She never had an ounce of sense in things like

that." She added, with a slight increase of interest,—
"Why are you wearing your pearls, child?"

"I thought it safer traveling," said Violet. "He has not gone off with Lisette, Mother; at least at present, because she is here in London. I brought her up to London with me to-day."

"Oh," said Lady Ashwin; "you did go over, then, did you? You never answered my letter, but I supposed you would manage it somehow."

"I did not go to her, she came to me," said Violet. "Such information as I have is first-hand from Lisette, which saves possible mistake, doesn't it? I have not interviewed Cousin Agnes or Honoria."

"Well, you wouldn't have gained much," said Lady Ashwin, who had a vast contempt for her cousin, and an absolute dislike, founded on theory simply, for her cousin's elder niece. All the family Ingestre agreed in disliking Honoria heartily, while they merely shrugged and laughed over Lisette. Eveleen, the purest of the Ingestre types, always reflected a representative attitude by which that noble family could be judged.

After this, a period of Violet's talking again ensued, to which she attended more or less. Violet talked on end rather tiringly, and was getting excitable, walking to and fro. Her gestures in this mood were her father's, which Eveleen noticed, in passing, as unpromising. Eveleen looked at her figure, her slim hands clasped behind, the simple fashion of her hair and her sun-browned neck, and tried to realize the girl was married—she looked so slight and young.

"How is Charles?" she interrupted suddenly.

"Very well. He is coming to fetch me at half-past seven. You will be dressing, won't you? Shall I send him up to call?"

"Where do you propose to be?" said Eveleen, tacitly agreeing,—by means of not uttering a refusal and going on, a plan which in its simplicity can be recommended.

"Oh, I shall be in the kitchen, probably; I must have a word with Mason and the rest." She did not mention her designs on her father,—she thought the point better reserved, for reasons.

"Mason won't want you," observed Lady Ashwin. "She will be dishing up. I can't have Lisette on the premises," she proceeded calmly, as though her daughter's earnest pleading five minutes since had just reached the department of her brain. "I should have thought you could see that for yourself, Violet. I haven't the time. I can't waste it, anyhow, looking after a girl like that."

"You have plenty of time, Mother. Excuse me, it is true. You waste time only in making such absurd statements."

The girl had stopped short her perambulation, and was facing her. She was much older,—a woman; Eveleen noted it at once when she took the trouble to look her full and fairly in the face for the first time. They were conversing, she discovered to her astonishment, on a level. What was worse, no grain of that brilliant cleverness, regarded as a mere tiresome phenomenon in the child Violet, was wanting in the woman she must thus meet face to face. She held her sword,—and Eveleen had let her own mediocre faculties rust for long. It was extraordinarily disconcerting, the impression made on her for the moment: would be so, doubtless, to any mother brought suddenly, by a single quietly spoken phrase, to such a pass.

"How dare you?" she said mechanically.

"I must dare. I don't want to, really. It is a thing to be seen, not argued. It is a situation that you recognize in full, since you said Lisette might go to the bad. That phrase was on your lips,—of your own relation,—a girl,—a child. You can't refuse, for a reason that is no reason, to do the obvious, only thing. You will surely not dare that. You must write to Lisette to-night,—no, I will write for you, since we always found that best. Didn't

we? I will save you all the bother, and I think I can make her come. Mayn't I be your daughter, for the moment, and treat it as my house again? You used to let me ask my own friends here,—and Lisette is nearer to us than a friend."

She waited, and you could have heard a pin drop in the room. Her mother, her beautiful head sidelong on the couch, was watching her with lazy eyes. They held little hope of kindness, but at least she was attending—to something. Whether the sense of the words or the speaker of them was the question impossible to solve.

"I can put it so that she will not refuse," pleaded Violet. "She was jealous of my happiness and Charles,—a little; and she teased me, poor little thing; but she kissed me to-night. No one has ever tried to be kind to her, Mother, since that awful crash,—and before that they were too kind. She craves for the comfort and flattery she used to have; she worships the soft life. It is just natural to a little pussy cat like Lisette. She would jump on to any cushion offered her, you know. You will invite her to our cushions, won't you, dear Mother, just for a little time? Think what you would do without them."

She had approached quite near to Eveleen, and paused again, touching the silken cushion near her mother's head with a fine little nervous hand. The flash of a ring upon it caught Lady Ashwin's eye.

"Who gave you that?" she said, breaking her silence.

"Mr. Ingestre,—Cousin John: hadn't you seen it?" She twisted it nervously. "I believe there are heaps of my things you haven't seen. Cousin John mentioned Lisette in his letter rather anxiously. Did I tell you he wrote to me,—very kind about our escapade. He wanted to know if we were doing anything about it,—Cousin Agnes had been complaining to him as well. They all so dread a scandal: they would all be so horrified if it happened,—too late. That is the worst of coming to decisions slowly,—though really; I don't want to fuss more than

necessary in life, you know. But there are moments when you must fuss,—I am pretty sure Father would agree with me,” said Violet.

“Do you intend to talk to your father,” said Eveleen, “in this strain?”

“Not unless you give me leave,” said Violet.

“Well, if you say a word to him of any such nonsense, I shall never speak to you again. You can be sure of that, anyhow. Do you intend to?”

“I told you, Mother,” she said patiently, “Father would be very willing to have Lisette. He would probably send to-night.”

“Would he, indeed? If you persuaded him, you mean.”

Violet saw that she had touched the spring of an old jealousy, and regretted it too late.

“You are going to him,” said Eveleen; “I know you. You think you will get your way.”

“My way is yours,” the girl repeated, with a desperate clearness that was almost sharp. “Can you not understand me? That is why I have come to you. I could have gone to him, couldn’t I? It was open to me, if I had only wanted my way. I want yours. If anyone speaks to Father it will be you, not me. It *should* be you.”

“Oh,—very well. I suppose you will keep your word. You are excited,” she added, still suspicious.

“I am not.” The girl controlled herself. “I am aware what I am saying when I tell you I will not go. I promise it,—but you must, and to-night. He is coming in at seven —” She stopped anew, and bit her lip.

“Oh, you know that, do you? He is in to dinner, for once; but he goes out again directly after, and will be late. I don’t see how I can see him. You can’t talk of private things at dinner, anyhow.”

“Very well,” said Violet, meeting this brilliant argument. “See him at seven. I renounce my time to you. I had wanted to ask him something, a point of business; but this is far more urgent, naturally. Mine can wait.”

"Thanks," said Lady Ashwin. "That is really very kind, considering it is my own husband. But I have not the slightest wish or intention of seeing him on such a subject. I shall not think of it,—nor will you."

Pause again: Violet, summoning her hope and courage, played the card of family pride.

"You said another thing, Mother,—that Cousin Agnes had failed with Lisette because she did not know how to handle her. You mean you know yourself. You do, because she is an Ingestre, don't you? I thought her curiously like you in some ways. I believe you could make her do what you wanted, though she is set against everybody else."

"I have no doubt I could," said Eveleen calmly. "How did she strike you as like me, may I ask?"

She was interested, evidently, though the tone was contemptuous. Violet's card was not trumped as yet. Eveleen's egoism was always awake, however her better impulses slept or drowsed. Violet pursued eagerly:

"She likes the things that you like,—the same things amuse her and make her angry,—she is like you to look at too. She really is; Charles noticed it."

"What is she like?"

"Lisette like? But you know! She is terribly—thrillingly pretty,—just as you wrote to me. She thrilled us both,—all the hotel."

"Charles admired her, did he? I shouldn't mind seeing her," said Eveleen slowly; "but I shan't have her in the house."

"Only because you said so before, Mother darling,—not because you will really refuse to let her come. She is funny,—naughty, of course,—she would amuse you. Her effect on people is amusing too,—you could see it if you took her out. You needn't say she is a little cousin,—everyone would see that at once, and laugh."

It was exquisitely adroit, as a tack, and Lady Ashwin was shaken. She had no objection to taking out a little

cousin, like her, who could be trusted to make a stir. Eveleen made a stir herself, so the sensation would be doubled. She had once dreamed of such a daughter as Lisette; only the daughter when she came, by taking after the Ashwins, disappointed her hopes.

"What are you after, in this, Violet?" she said slowly. The question, to her mind, rose directly out of the rest.

"After? What should I be? Only her safety."

"Safety from men? She'll never be safe from men—that sort. I can tell you that."

"Well, Mother dear, she had better marry decently, then, hadn't she?" The girl spoke dryly. "You could see to that."

Eveleen thought it over for a period. "I won't," she then said suddenly and simply. "I had more than enough disturbance marrying you."

One more pause—that way seemed blocked. The girl gathered herself for a final effort: wherefore, of course, she overdid it. She was too intense, though every word she spoke was just to her observation, earnest and deeply felt.

"She is capable of crime, Mother," said Violet. "She is hunted and miserable,—not over the brink, but near it. I have seen her eyes these two days. She might steal,—she is destitute. She might drink,—more easily still. If the worst happened, by any unhappy chance, she might kill the man. It is not unknown in your family history, is it? Not quite."

She repeated, with extraordinary vehemence and accuracy, to Eveleen who had the Ingestre chronicles by heart, more than one case of criminal violence in the direct line; women concerned in them all. Of course, romance had dressed the stories; duels, prophecies, specters and such truck bedizened them elaborately, when related within the ring; but the naked facts of character were there, and it was astonishing how the facts stood out, dealt with by the girl's dexterous dry tongue. They hardly

sounded picturesque, so stated, and more than once Eveleen winced.

"Anything may happen," Violet finished, "may it not, to a girl with that blood in her? You must see—anything. And you are responsible: it will be laid at your door if she does."

"Nonsense," said Lady Ashwin coolly. "John is not such a fool. Not to mention he would take my word in front of yours,—I should know how to manage John. I shall say I did what I could. Anyhow, I wrote twice."

Wrote twice! Yet once more, the hopeless, lengthy pause.

"Very well, then,—I must have her," said Violet.

It was by far the most effective thing she had said, had she wanted to be effective. Her mother's head turned instantly, in frank surprise. Then it turned back again.

"Violet,—you little fool!" she said simply.

The girl gasped, clutching at the nearest support—a chair. It was one thing to receive a letter, another to receive the written implication full in the face like this. And in such a tone!—tolerant amusement, not even permitting contempt. The gods were hard on Violet.

She replied, after a second or so, standing rigid, turned away.

"You may insult me, Mother, but not Charles. Is that the last thing you have to say to me?"

"Don't be dignified and frosty," advised Eveleen, "and make scenes about nothing. Come here."

Violet did not come, or stir.

"Are you crying?" her mother inquired. "You will get so excited. Fool was a little hard, perhaps, when you thought you had been so clever. I'll tell you one thing, you nearly made me think I'd try it, once. . . . But it's against reason, really, to expect it. I'll write to John. . . . Look here, give me that girl's address. I will go and see her in the morning if you like,—I rather want to see her. I don't know why you should be so concerned

about it. I dare say I can bring her to reason, and get her to go back. Only for goodness' sake don't do anything high-faluting and hasty,—you can't imagine you know men more than I do, at your age. . . . Come here, Violet, I want you."

It was a very long speech for Eveleen, and showed that some vague effect, from the emotion spent in the discussion, had reached her. It showed the vaguest trifle of remorse as well. Violet repeated internally that it was her nature, and she was trying to be kind. She turned and came slowly. She was rather white, but not crying: fortunately, for Eveleen hated tears.

"Silly little goose," she said pleasantly, being victorious. "Give me a kiss." She held her on the couch beside her for a moment. "Do, for goodness' sake, avoid making scenes for Charles. It's only not to get excited,—men do hate it so. And it's not good for you, either, really,—your father will tell you that." After this maternal effort, she paused. "You really must get your hair done properly to-morrow," she proceeded. "You'd hardly be taken for your age like that, though it suits you. You looked rather nice, standing over there. One of these days you may be pretty." Another interval, while she warmed the girl's cold hand. She had almost got as far as affection by these ingenious means. The general aspect was all right, anyhow, and Eveleen went in for aspects. "Are you and Charles stopping to dinner?" she asked. "You had better. I shall make him, when he comes."

"Make him,—if you can," said Violet, very low. "I think you will not persuade him, to-night. There's Léontine," she added gently, at the knock. "Good night, Mother. I am going to see Father now."

II

The other interview, parallel as it were with this, was short perforce, for her father had, as usual, been detained. She had to wait for him some time, sitting in his little

private study, almost in the dark. She was not sorry to be granted an interval, among the friendly books and signs of his daily presence, to calm her thoughts. Her mother was more "tiring to the soul," even than Lisette, and the gentle light and studious atmosphere of the familiar room were more soothing to Violet's soul than immediate company, even of the kindest, would have been. Her first natural instinct, like that of the father she awaited, was toward retirement and intellectual calm; the instinct was only overlaid by small feminine distractions and the habit of society; but she came back at intervals to grave places, to the haunts of books and those who read them, as to her real home.

She began to think his books would have to serve her for himself before he finally arrived; but when she did get her interview, though brief and conducted of necessity at top speed, it was a success. She had not to waste time waiting for him to follow, luckily, and she produced in the course of it every single effect she wanted, quite easily,—more than she expected; for she succeeded in surprising him, making him jump: he, the wariest person of Violet's acquaintance, was absolutely startled. He had not the least expected her to come that night. It was a momentary triumph, quite worth any amount of waiting to secure.

"My darling!" he ejaculated, as she seized him. "Why did you not warn me? You have had to wait?"

Father and courtier were perfectly combined; *he* was not oblivious of her new dignity, at least.

"I should think so!" said Mrs. Shovell plaintively. "I do nothing but wait for my parents, in this house. That is how I spend my time under their roof. We have just thirteen minutes now before my husband comes." She looked at her watch in comical despair. "I don't know, really, how ever we shall get through. Shall we talk simultaneously, Father darling, or what? I am in straits, as it happens, for advice."

"I am horrified," said Sir Claude, without emotion. "You do not look so, particularly."

"*Not* professional, don't imagine it! Much more resembling Scotland Yard. I want to make your flesh creep," quoted Violet at random from a favorite author. "Will you just sit in that chair and listen eloquently? You know the way I mean."

"Certainly,—if I do, but I doubt it. May I ask three questions first?"

"No,—yes,—get along."

"Three will serve, I think." He considered carefully. "Have you seen your mother?"

"To be sure. I had tea with her. She knew all about my visit in advance,—only she didn't tell you. Mother did not see the almighty hurry, probably."

"Thanks,—so I supposed." His eyes were on her, steady and amused. "Well, secondly: are you prepared for a primitive state of things at home: Genesis before the Creation, and worse?"

"Hasn't the light come?" said Mrs. Shovell innocently. "The company informed me so. You don't know your Scripture, Father, I am afraid. Dearest, *don't* say she has fagged you to go round?"

"I have been there half the day, quite fruitlessly," said Sir Claude. "I can—*not* make them see that blue's not green; and I could not think of more than one way to express it."

"Couldn't you? I should have added that green's not blue, and then left them in peace to make comparisons. The lower classes need such gentle handling," said Violet, sitting down on his knee, having tried the dignity of a chair and rejected it.

"Oh well,—go and handle them gently. I didn't. The third thing——"

"Father, if you have been trampling on my workmen, I shall complain. I am delighted they are still about. I intend to have picnics with them, pleasantly, all this week.

I am hoping to know them intimately,—Christian names. I shall flirt with the foreman,—oh, how is Mr. Ford, by the way?"

"The third thing," said her father, lifting a hand to ward frivolity, "is serious, Pussy, because imminent. The need is close at hand. What does your husband drink? There is nothing in your house for him to-night."

Violet's gray eyes flashed, and she drew herself up.

"*Your health* he may drink,—in water! Father, darling, you will really make me cry! The idea of your wasting your magnificent mind on such a thing! Charles' beer!—he can fetch it himself from a pub! Now do dismiss all such trifles where they really belong, and listen eloquently,—do you mind? I simply love your face when you do that, contented and watchfully blinking. I don't wonder the least," Mrs. Shovell summed up in her intensest manner, "people give you guineas for looking so."

"They don't," Claude assured her. "Only half the guinea for that. Go on,—I'll do my best."

She told him the story of her loss, avoiding names, in the most erratic language, though he seemed able to understand. He listened, with the expression to which Violet alluded, glancing at her from time to time. He would sooner have played with her, of course; but since it was to be business, and the time was short, it was better to get it done, and their minds ran admirably in harness together. Nothing she said was foolish, only wild. And her wildness, though it clearly had some physical cause, did not disturb him mightily; for by all the signs his fatherly and physicianly mind could muster, she was marvelously well.

"You are sure just when you lost it?" he said. "Do you suspect the thief?"

"I do. There were two people who might have done it equally, close to me when it disappeared: one was a girl whom I have known, or at least known about, for years, and one a man we met quite by chance at the hotel."

"And you suspect the girl?"

"Now how did you know that, Father?"

"By the form of the sentence."

"Well, it would be politer not to steal my dramatic effects. I suspect the girl. In fact, I am almost certain it was she, and not him," finished Violet with elegant deliberation.

"Evidence?" said Sir Claude.

"Psychological largely," said Violet. "But I suppose you won't take that? Well, the girl was in want of money, immediate want, and the man was quite well off. That, of course, is not conclusive. Secondly, the man knew I had taken out the only thing of value and put it round my neck." She snicked the pearls she was still wearing. "In fact, he advised me to do so. And the girl had every reason to think it was still inside the case."

"Humph!" Claude considered. "Did you take any steps? Promptly, I mean."

"No. My husband was not there when it occurred. To tell the truth, I thought he might have taken it himself,—my husband does that sort of thing. When I realized Charles was innocent, I had had time to think, and I did not bring up the subject."

"You mean Charles did not notice it was gone?" He looked at her.

"No, darling," said Violet tranquilly. "He is not a kind of lynx and bloodhound in one, like some people. He is very restful company."

"And you incline to do nothing in the matter? And expect my moral support in doing it? Is that it?"

"Precisely,—all of it. You hit the mark." He considered again.

"But if so," he suggested, "why tell me at all?"

"Feminine, rather," admitted Violet, "and consequently intricate. Can you bear it? Nearly every pretty thing I possess was given me by you, wedding presents notwithstanding. Broadly judging by wedding presents,

you are the only person of taste of my acquaintance. The things in that case were yours exclusively, chosen for beauty, not swagger, the rest being at the Bank. They were old things,—unmarried,—and I am not yet legally of age," she added hastily.

He tapped his head. "What a jumble of sentiment and equity. Don't mix the issues. Of age or not, anything I give you is yours, you can assume it. Fling it out of the window if you like. What was the value of the trinkets?"

"I have not the least idea," said Mrs. Shovell plaintively. "I must depend on you even for that."

He made her describe them, and the occasions to which they belonged; and, with his sure memory for gems, recollected each in turn.

"About thirty pounds," he said thoughtfully.

"Lucky it was no worse," suggested Violet. "Fortune favors the careless in this instance, doesn't it?"

"It seems to. Would it be presumptuous to suggest that it is unwise to play with your pearls in public?"

"Most impertinent," said Violet. "It would probably close this conversation."

"Why do you carry them about, when the Bank is there?"

"Pure sentiment, Father, a thing you can hardly understand. Charles calls me sentimental. Besides," she added, with sudden mischief, "I was safe enough at the hotel. The hiss of the word artificial simply followed me about."

The doctor's eyes flashed, and he would have spoken, but she caught him laughing by the throat.

"Gently," she said. "Two people appreciated them thoroughly,—the two that accompanied me to-day. She wanted them fearfully, I know, poor dear. I can't help being thankful she did not take them, because I should have been forced to act. You would have forced me, if not my own feelings. I could—*not* have borne it. I can hardly bear it as it is. It is three birthdays gone from my

life,—she little knew! If it had only—only—been the Ingestre wedding presents!”

“Was the girl in distress?” said Claude, touching her hair as she hid her face on his shoulder. He had seldom suffered such showers of flattery,—it had evidently been storing up. His heart had long been open to all girls for her sake, so the question fell naturally into the context.

“She was,” said Violet, just audibly. With all her heart she longed to tell him, for she knew his help would be ready and his judgment sure; but her hands were tied. Her silence and rigidity spoke the fact eloquently; and Sir Claude made no attempt to press her. During the interval he took stock of her in his usual merciless fashion.

“You have put on weight, Pussy,” he observed.

“Oh, poor man,—am I too much for him?” She looked up. “It’s all that cream. Charles simply drove me into competition. You never saw anything like him when he gets to work,—and yet he gets no plumper, perceptibly. I suppose he talks it off. Do you like Cornish cream, Father?”

“Very much, thank you,” said Sir Claude.

“I counted upon Mother, but I was not sure of you. I brought two little jugs, for you not to quarrel. I shouldn’t like you to quarrel in my absence, the first night.”

“Are you not staying to dinner?”

“Oh dear no,—couldn’t think of it. I didn’t even ask Mason what Mother had ordered when I was in the kitchen just now.”

“Great self-control,” he agreed. He waited a minute. “Has your mother written to you these last weeks?”

“Yes,” said the girl, very gently.

“I thought she might.” His face cleared. “You excuse my asking?”

“I do, dear. *You* have written less than usual, I may observe.”

“I have resigned my responsibilities,” said Sir Claude.

“Father! Will you kindly take that back?”

"Most of my responsibilities. Some of them, Pussy,—one or two."

"Not any," she said. "It's no good hedging. You never were my husband, whatever else you set up to be. Charles' job is completely different,—harder, perhaps," she admitted pensively. "There ~~he~~ is," she added, though his quick ear had heard nothing. A second later a hand pushed the swing door, and Charles entered to fetch her. The doctor greeted him without moving,—indeed, he was unable to, since Mrs. Showell did not stir from his knee.

"Oh, Father, before I forget," she said. "Will you show Charles your medals? He is simply longing to see them,—aren't you?"

"I should like to, really awfully," said Charles.

"I should be charmed," said Sir Claude, without expression. "Now we have fulfilled the forms sufficiently. She's safe to forget for another year."

"You've got the key on you!" exclaimed Violet in indignation. She proceeded to the search.

"No, I assure you," he said patiently. "None of those. It's on Ford's bunch, probably, unless he has mislaid it."

"Father, do you expect to go to Heaven?" said Violet very seriously. "Because you won't, at this rate. You know you would never trust a mere Ford with your Order of Merit, not to mention the ducky little one the Prince of——"

The doctor signed to Charles, who gagged her obligingly with both hands.

"Has she been boring you?" he inquired, glancing above her.

"Only on a few subjects, this for one," said Charles. "I can head her off if I'm careful. But this seems to have more sides than most, so it's harder to dodge. . . . How's that?" he added to Violet.

"Rather well put," said Violet. "But there's a medal

for each side of him, if you had let me explain. It's highly instructive, really,—and an awful warning. If you never waste a golden minute,—oh, goodness me, weren't they golden, Charles, in the shrimpiest pool!—that's where you come to. *That!*" She pointed, leaning back against Charles. Then she swung forward. "Good night, my own blessing. I hope you'll like the cream. Your advice has been invaluable over that little difficulty of mine. Professional, with a difference. As a consulting occasional solicitor, with a moralizing turn, you might have scored several other decorations for your best coat. Only I am afraid you would sum up everybody's evidence far too fast, and fluster them."

"Solicitors don't sum up, my child," said Charles, with reproval. "Try judges."

"Don't they? Well, he would make a nice-looking judge when he's a trifle older: a kind one. And he would not need powdering, very soon." She smoothed a crisp dark lock on which the silver was gaining rapidly. "He will be rather more respectable as a father too, when that takes place. More presentable in the background, among his daughter's guests."

"Tell me when you have had enough," said Charles to his father-in-law, "and I will muffle her with my scarf. It may not have struck you, V., that our taxi-tariff is running all this time."

"Did you *call* one?" said Violet. "Why didn't you *warn* me,—idiot! I can tell him the rest to-morrow, when he comes to call. A mere formality, Father; twenty minutes will do. No time for protest," she added, ever more rapidly, as her victim snatched up his engagement-book. "Every second is wasting Charles' substance, and he cannot stop. Any time after five would suit me,—just wire to the King you can't. I made his acquaintance last May,—the May before last, and he's quite agreeable. Charles,—my coat! Thanks, dearest; now I really am ready, I believe."

"Violet looks extremely well," observed Eveleen across the dinner-table; softened doubtless by a perspective of cream.

"She is very happy," said Claude, with gentle distinctness. "I am thankful. That boy has more in him than I thought."

"He's improved too," said Eveleen. "Not so languishing. He stands up and talks. He was quite amusing the few minutes he stayed with me. I like that light complexion when it goes brown."

"That will go off soon enough," said Claude. "The rest, we may trust, will not. Will you go and see them, Eveleen?"

"Naturally—to-morrow. I could fit it in just after dinner, I think," said Lady Ashwin, pondering. "Then I could be sure of both."

"I will fit it in just before dinner," reflected the master of the house. "Then I shall be sure of one alone."

He did not note the hour, all-important as it was to miss his wife, and to catch Violet; being still able, in the day's most tedious complexity, to trust his memory for details.

III

Little did Mrs. Shovell suspect, in the course of those last days' incidents, and those two casual interviews she had had *tête-à-tête* with Marmaduke Jones, what a sleuth-hound she had let loose upon the world. It would have afforded some quite thrilling finishing touches to Charles' original "narrative" concerning this inconspicuous young man, if either husband or wife had been enabled to study this side of him more completely. But it was just from husband and wife that the really striking qualities in Jones were concealed, for the reason that they were bad-weather qualities, such as the glamour of golden honeymoon does not encourage or tempt from their hiding-place in the heart of a shy young man. Thus, to the end of the honey-

moon's concluding journey, when Marmaduke had the last glimpse on the station-platform of Mrs. Shovell's whimsical little pointed face under her feathered hat, he preserved the mask. The instant he turned his back on her, no doubt, the wild gleam of the bloodhound loosed on a scent, flickered furtively in his ferocious eye. That is at least how the facts would have figured in the narrative, had Charles been allowed his fair chance at them.

Jones called a farewell to Shovell as he passed,—Shovell looking straight, fair and indifferent, as usual, amid an unholy ferment of men and things: airing, no doubt, at that six-foot eminence of his, a perfectly quiet mind; since his pleasant prestige of youth, ease, arrogance, together with a certain tone of voice and cut of clothes infallibly connected with our older universities to the uneducated mind, surrounded him at every turn with servile porters eager to do his will, and, in preference to many an older and more deserving traveler, to tear out his wife's boxes from everybody else's which they overturned, and in response to a mere lift of brow, jerk of head, or brief careless word of direction, to charge and heave then onto his chosen cab. He was a young lord of the earth, and looked it; but he spared, as usual, a pleasant word to Jones, across the scrambling porters.

"See you, shan't we? Rather,—don't forget."

Forget! Why, he forgot himself the next instant, probably; and Jones, melting into that station turmoil which begins and closes so many human tragedies, was blotted out likewise upon the tablet of Charles' mind. Shovell was created to forget, every bit as surely as Jones was created to remember, every day, hour, minute of the time they had passed together in that enchanted land. It was already a kind of agreeable game, pretty but played out, to Shovell, and his thoughts full of the ancient interests and occupations, the new duties and diversions, of the town. Jones alone forgot nothing easily, whether work or play, having a retentive, well-managed mind, working like

an excellent little road-engine to and fro along a limited span, but absolutely to be trusted in the accomplishment of its common duties, day by day.

His mind had retained for him, for instance, quite solidly and safely, three addresses, only one of which, being foreign, he had written down. That was Mrs. Shovell's quiet hotel in Paris, where they talked some English but things were French. The other two were the new house in Livingstone Gardens, near Holland Park, mentioned, in passing, by Shovell as his future abode; and the boarding-house address, patronized by the lovely Miss Lisette, and handed him for an instant at the junction by Shovell's wife. Jones had also jotted on his cuff the name Addenbroke, a queer one; since it appeared the girl had been only "pulling the leg" of the other (and older) girls at the hotel, when she entered herself on the books with a title. This last fact, which seemed to amuse the Shovells, had been a decided relief to Jones, who jibbed at titles, and who foresaw some probable intercourse, in the near future, with the young person who no longer carried that alarming prefix to her name.

Jones had decided, during the leisure of the long journey, that he did not greatly like Lisette, though it was none the less his business to care for her. He had been, to begin with, most horribly torn in mind over the duty of deciding whether she was a "lady." She had not seemed to him so the first night, especially in the light of Studley's visible appreciation. In spite of certain things to her credit, such as her crisp accent, well-made, dark-colored and rather careless clothes, and ready reception of and response to Shovell's high-quality witticisms, not to mention her occasional references to the aristocracy, some of whom seemed to be her relations,—Jones on his own account would have refused Lisette that great name: had it not been for Mrs. Shovell's manner towards her. That was a unique testimonial, that easy sisterly acceptance, and above all the constant pretty laughter at her riskiest

speeches. Jones had seen her laugh, when her husband himself stared, and when Jones, in the corner beyond, felt scorched and petrified. It looked as though what sounded flashy and fast to his untutored ear might be in reality only the mistakes of others, reflected, as it were, in a singularly frank, shallow and childish mind, a little embittered by hard experience. It might, of course, be so, though Marmaduke still felt dazed in retrospect by some of Miss Lisette's opinions and expressions.

Beyond this,—it had to be set against Miss Addenbroke's account,—she had been really impertinent, not once only, but several times, to the young married lady of Jones' party. She had laughed extremely loud at the name of the book Mrs. Shovell was reading, and jerked it across the carriage, so that in falling from the seat to the floor its leaves were bent. She had criticized Mrs. Shovell's hand-made sandwiches most rudely, and then proceeded to eat three-fourths of them, which must have been a sign of some inner appreciation, gracelessly and ungratefully disguised. She had tried on Mrs. Shovell's hat, wrinkled her critical little nose over each of its silver pins in turn, and, with most unjustifiable curiosity, sought for the name of the maker within. She had done a thing far worse, for Marmaduke, which he could still barely forgive her. She had winked at him,—at Jones,—when she woke, as fresh as a cricket, from her nap, and discovered that her cousin had also fallen asleep within her husband's arm. Jones hoped very much he had betrayed by his wooden and repellent aspect, on this occasion, his true opinion of this irreverent proceeding on the part of Miss Addenbroke; but since she continued to smile at him, calmly and confidentially, he could not be sure.

Another matter as to which he could not be sure, naturally, was whether Miss Addenbroke liked him. Her speech and conduct seemed no safe guide, since she continually contradicted her own proceedings. For instance, she had drawn, for the benefit of her connections, a very

violent and childish caricature of her sister's suitor uttering the word "Honoriam," with exclamation points, inclosed in a long balloon; and then, turning the sheet, had begun a careless but really excellent likeness of Mr. Shovell, smoking in the corner. She had chosen him as model without hesitation, and he, as obviously, enjoyed being drawn. It was only when his wife betrayed curiosity and interest in the portrait that the artist, like a naughty child, spoiled the whole suddenly with a scribble, and told the indignant model he had a "stodgy" face, not worth her serious pains. She then, instead of turning in the obvious direction, tried Jones: and made him very uncomfortable indeed by her attentions and commentary, until she abandoned art at the appearance of the lunch-basket.

Then again: she had interrupted a manly discussion of mountaineering to boast of her adventures as a child during various excursions on foot in her father's company. Her courage and endurance, by her own account, and her father's at second-hand, were remarkable. In the midst of which boasting the train entered a tunnel, and Miss Lisette, terrified, had crouched up to Mrs. Shovell's side, and clung child-like to her arm. When the train came to a stop, still in the darkness, she had been so nervously apprehensive of an accident having occurred that she was only prevented by male force from springing at the communication cord. On emerging into the sunlight, letting go Violet, she had bidden Jones feel her hand; and when he unwillingly did so he found it was really cold and limp. She had next proceeded, with fearfully realistic detail, and singular heartlessness, to relate to him the story of the accident in which her parents had lost their lives, and in which Miss Lisette, having been cleverly rescued, alone uninjured, from the broken carriage, had taken a prominent part. She seemed absolutely to relish the description, especially when it came to the point of her portrait,—a nice one,—having been in all the picture

papers next day: where, in the neighboring column, of course, Mr. and Mrs. Addenbroke figured on the list of the dead.

Jones, really quite perplexed what to think during this recital, had glanced at Mrs. Shovell beyond, and found she had shut her eyes with an expression of keen pain that explained, if not everything, at least much. He decided at once that the girl had suffered horribly herself at the time, and was trying to disgust them now deliberately by a kind of bravado.

"Look at her," Lisette appended to her own story with a little laugh. "She knows about it too, of course. They're her people as well."

Thus it became clear that she had carried through her late effort, having started it idly, in her own despite, and to tease the other girl; being not less sensitive herself, only wishing to display her callousness and contempt of weakness, whether her own weakness, or that of others who cared for her.

This experience, and above all that look in Mrs. Shovell's face, patient beneath its pain, set Jones at once on the track of new discoveries in this fair young lady she guarded. Lisette Addenbroke was defiant, her hand against every man, her back against the wall. She pricked and tormented these two people, who had certainly been very kind to her: she took the offensive towards Jones, who had neither done nor wished her any harm. She looked as far as possible from crying, at all stages of that lively journey; yet Jones imagined she might have cried, and recently. Briefly, a very little time after that brutal story of hers concerning the calamity that had made her an orphan, a singular thing happened,—Jones' pity awoke. How far it was as a direct consequence of his suspicion that Mrs. Shovell pitied too, beneath her laughter, cannot be determined entirely. Pity, as an emotion, is certainly contagious; so much may safely be said.

But the important thing was that pity, in this particular

Jones, was more than an emotion, it might almost be called an alarm. It awoke a whole department of his being, a department which, on holiday, could be allowed to lie in abeyance. It was the same crying need of his nature that urged him to claim that vacant secretaryship of his "show" in London, which various other good-natured persons were "quite too busy" to undertake; and what is more, to claim it at a moment when a sudden accession to fortune, at an age when youth can most appreciate it, would have turned many a young man's head to giddier dreams. It merely suggested to Marmaduke that he had, at last, time to be useful.

Jones was one of the people—fortunately not rare in this soft-hearted, serious Northern race,—who from birth feel a duty to the community, and whose thoughts turn from early manhood in the high philanthropic direction. Of these young men, all excellent folk and many very dull, a number go into the church,—let us say one of the churches,—the "church army," or the more distant mission field. A small proportion, by a singular psychological leading that it would take volumes of far finer study than this to follow or define, go into the other army,—their nation's. A quantity go to lay societies and settlements in the East End, and conduct parties of poor lads round museums, on tours, or to the life of holiday camps. A few write rather stupid books for children. A few more,—free lances, of whom Jones,—take up the odd causes, appear at the less popular meetings, do horrid jobs such as offering votes of thanks and distributing prizes at mission-schools, and write the few sincerely indignant letters to the papers, generally much inferior in style, among the hundreds of better-composed and touching addresses that flood the public columns, every week.

The only difference between Jones and many others of his kind was that he had had a better education. And by this, with deference to Mr. Shovell, we do not mean that he had been an unattached member of Oxford University,

but simply that he had received a good education from his parents. It is really as important as the other, and the other is of singularly little use without it.

Charles himself owed his guidance in life to women chiefly: and Jones had also been so inspired. His mother had been the mother of a hero, whatsoever her son ultimately became. She had shown him the path in every direction, and supplemented at every point his father's gifts of steady sense and steadier purpose. Mrs. Jones,—as to whom Violet had been so persistently curious when Charles' chatter had been of Jones alone,—had lost the use of a finger as a young woman by saving a child from burning, and that small reminder had been before Marmaduke throughout his most sensitive years. Violet, sitting in her corner, beyond Jones, while he read his dull book and watched Lisette furtively at intervals, would have been greatly interested to hear that and other tales of Mrs. Jones. It might even have relieved her of some of her vaguely-haunting anxiety. Charles, who also noticed these frequent glances on Jones' part, merely hugged the amusing thought that, against his better nature, their model young man was being attracted.

So he was attracted, as events shortly proved. By a chance that critics would have thought most suspicious, he occupied the same omnibus as Lisette, when she left the station finally, only he was within and she above. Jones knew she would go above, because the man who followed her,—a well-dressed and prosperous-looking man,—was smoking. It was the same man as before, and he had not been in the train, but had met her at a rendezvous in the station. As to the omnibus, Jones was interested; it was not the least such an omnibus as he would have used naturally, and it took a route in a diametrically opposite direction to that of his third address—the boarding-house. It interested Jones because, on the subject of the boarding-house, at which she had scoffed elaborately, it had seemed to him Lisette was sincere. The change therefore signified

a new departure, and as the girl went up, she looked pink and pouting, as though resenting such a change. The man, on the other hand, was benignantly calm.

Lisette did not see Jones, as need not be stated, because her mind was occupied evidently by a recent quarrel; and also because, as we have so often asserted, he was exactly like a hundred other young men who were crowding the London conveyances at the busiest hour of return from work. His appearance, to refer to Charles again, would have been suspicious in the eyes of nobody unless the detective-novelist, or that novelist's well-trained reader, such as Charles. And since Charleses are more rare than Joneses in London 'buses between five and six o'clock, the sleuth-hound sitting in the corner passed unsuspected.

Marmaduke also noticed, as the pair went aloft, that the man was carrying something that might have been a bag or dispatch-case; but he paid no closer attention until, just after Lisette and her escort got down at a busy street-corner, and as Jones was preparing to follow them, a commotion occurred on the top of the omnibus. Some people, after the usual short altercation over treasure-trove, handed down an object.

"Man left it who got off with the girl," was the information. "It's hers, probably. Can you catch him?"

It seemed late to the conductor to catch him, considering the crowd.

"Can you still see him?" he called to his informant above, who had the best point of view.

"I can see the girl," was the remarkable answer. "Just turning the corner, next to the right. He will be with her."

"No go," muttered the conductor: and opening the bag, added for consolation, "It's empty."

"Give it to me," said Jones, as he swung off. "I'm going that way, and I had a look at him, as it happens. I'm quick on my feet," he added.

"It's my orders to hand over——" the man was begin-

ning, when he caught Jones' eye. It was not the eye of a thief, to that experienced observer of his kind; he had even experience enough to know it was the contrary. "Right, sir," he said, delivering it; and added with condescension, "Go it!"

"I'll take it to your place if I miss him," called Jones, and was off. The people on the omnibus-roof, and the conductor on the steps watched, amused, as the figure of Jones twisted like an eel through the congestion on the crowded pavement, and made for the corner where the pair had vanished. It was a very godsend to have this excuse for haste, though he much feared he had already lost his trail.

"He'll do it, I bet," said the friendly conductor, glancing upward at his public with a knowing, sidelong nod which implied a recognition of the sporting style of Jones: and turned to his work again.

Jones did not do it. He did not even try to, once the corner was turned, for the street beyond it was empty. It was not for the sake of the lost property that he regretted it, honestly bred as he was, and righteous in all his instincts, for he knew in one short shock at the moment of receiving it that what he held was not the dark man's property, still less Lisette's. There was no room for doubt, indeed, as to the ownership; for the dark leather case, daintily mounted, had three small initials stamped on it clearly,—V. I. A.—and he knew, even in detail, what they stood for: Violet Ingestre Ashwin,—her maiden name. The information about Mrs. Shovell Jones had collected was, by this time, quite as varied and striking as that which she and her husband, in conjunction, had collected about him; and even more accurate, for Jones had little imagination, and regarded facts as more generally useful and satisfactory. A seven or eight-hours' railway journey in the society of three lively and loquacious young people is likely to offer a store of facts to a bystander who knows how to collect them. Jones collected his, not out of curi-

osity purely, but from a native need to have his information well packed and straight, if he had it at all; and since, owing to their charm, he could not but attend to them, he stored steadily, like an ant, against the day when he might need the knowledge.

Well,—the thing being her property, she must naturally have it. That was so obvious a point that he put it aside. Next thought to this,—the contents, also hers, were in that dark man's pocket. The contents did *not* include the necklace of pearls. Jones, like Violet, thanked Providence for that, and not his own prudence. But they must, on the other hand, include several of the other beautiful things she had worn, the little things that flashed on her fingers, in her hair, or among the soft folds of her pretty bodices in Jones' neighborhood of an evening. That struck him first; then, immediately afterwards, that the girl Lisette would "catch it" from a man with a face like that, if he came to know that she had missed the more valuable booty—the pearls. That is, granted she had been commissioned to steal,—there remained another alternative. A whole series of the girl's odd little defiant tones and expressions came back to his mind as he pondered her bearing and weighed her conceivable motives.

"She said I could have anything of hers I wanted, and I shall. People should say what they mean, shouldn't they?" He could hear the voice.

It would have been just like Lisette,—Jones' latest conception of Lisette,—to take the pearls out of sheer wanton mischief, after that; not at all out of a natural bent towards criminality,—such a girl cannot be a criminal. She is caught and punished as such frequently, and lacerates all thoughtful folks' minds with pity when she is. Society must defend itself against such as Lisette: that is the sole excuse for society in punishing; for there is no crime to deal with,—no studied crime,—and the punishment is so pitifully useless as well.

Alas! Jones saw the path to retribution straight ahead

for this particular errant girl. Not society's retribution, probably, but the more ruthless revenge of nature and of fate. Jones could not word his thoughts, like Violet; but he saw the vengeance that hovered over that lovely little sea-nymph clearly: close above, quite ready to strike, as a vulture strikes a dove. The victim felt the shadow already; the shadow had lain in her eyes as she faced him carelessly in the train. It was odious to think of,—un-thinkable,—except that Marmaduke thought it. It is just such men as Marmaduke who give thought to the un-thinkable most steadily.

Having made his inquiries fruitlessly, and considered, he made up his mind to the next thing in order. He took the swiftest cab he could see, and drove to the third address on his list,—the boarding-house.

IV

It was a long drive, but it gave him time on the way to study his next plans in the campaign. Arriving at the house, a plain but decent building in the west-central quarter, he inquired if a Miss Addenbroke was to arrive there that night.

"No, sir, was the simple answer.

"No lady of the name of Poynter, either?" Jones supposed.

"A lady called Poynter was to have come, but had not yet appeared. They supposed she had missed her train."

"If she comes to-night," said Jones, "will you have the goodness to wire me here?" He handed his official title and his club address. "It is very serious news for her. And please, for the same reason, be very kind and careful of her till I come. She is quite young, and it is a case for caution, if you understand."

A little awed by his manner, which was vaguely clerical, the woman agreed. He did not offer money, for he knew by instinct those cases where money impairs the moral

effect. This woman was "all right" to Jones' eye, which was a certain consolation.

Leaving that loose end of his skein knotted, as it were, he turned to the next thing. He went to the police. Jones had various links with the London police force, owing to the occasional exigences of his "show"; and his theory was that an application at once in that quarter is often useful, and saves time and trouble in the end. It saved him time, remarkably. He went to a local station, in the unpleasing quarter where Lisette and her escort had disappeared; and having excellent references to offer, he received after quite short delay, from first-hand authority, a list of lodgings, hotels and residences under suspicion.

He made the round of the hotels first; and by what he called the help of Heaven, and other people would have called an unjustifiable stroke of luck, he recovered almost at once his lost scent. Such strokes of luck among the infinite chances of large towns may happen to sleuth-hounds who are also thoroughly sensible people.

The two persons described had come to the hotel, and the young lady had taken a room. Her beauty had been remarked, as usual, and interest aroused in her, so that he learnt without delay the facts he wanted. As to the other person, the people of the hotel, naturally, "had no idea," as soon as ever Jones alluded to the police. All ideas, apparently, were far from their minds, especially as this gentleman, missionary or whatever he was, was startlingly free with his money. They would do anything whatever for him,—show him the lady's room? Oh, certainly. Jones was shown the room, which was empty; and there he waited, praying possibly,—it may be wiser not to ask. There were two bags on the floor, a man's and a woman's; one was opened, and the contents tossed about. On the bed lay a woman's white shirt and felt hat,—both of which he knew familiarly, having watched them during an eight-hours' journey. It would not have

been difficult for a duller man than Jones to deduce that Miss Lisette had put on Mrs. Shovell's moonlight blouse,—he clenched his hands thinking of it,—and gone out hatless, probably not very far, to dine.

Such was the fact: and again his good sense that was nearly subtlety brought him luck that was doubtless undeserved,—for the girl came back alone. Later, Jones learnt that the man wanted to examine his treasure-trove, the jewels, and dispose of them promptly before he left the town,—and that he simultaneously discovered that the pearls of which the girl had rashly boasted were not among them. That affected nothing at the time, only his behavior later as regarded Lisette.

"Well, I never!" said Lisette when she entered, stopping to stare with her lovely dilated eyes. "Well,—what next?"

Most young ladies might have been startled, even a little alarmed, at finding a young man, with an air of purpose, sitting in their chosen apartment, even though it should be such a simple-looking specimen as Jones. Lisette was not alarmed particularly: she was quite prepared to find Mr. Jones amusing, as he had shown himself to be more than once during their intercourse, unwittingly. Jones had quite taken Lisette's fancy, had he wished to be reassured, by showing himself so infallibly "shocked" at whatever she said. She liked him a good deal better than Violet's husband, who was really, she ultimately decided, by far the more "stuck-up" of the two. Jones was a "good sort," and it was by no means in his disfavor that he was ridiculous. People were often ridiculous, at least in Lisette's neighborhood.

For, of course, Lisette assumed at once, on his turning up again so soon after she had parted with him, that Jones had fallen head-over-ears in love with her in the train. His awkwardness at parting was now accounted for by the simple fact that he intended to see her again at the first opportunity,—and here he was. There was

some excuse for Lisette in so reasoning on facts observed, the phenomenon had occurred so often under her eyes since she was seventeen years old. She was old indeed,—far older than Violet Shovell,—in that experience. Also, like Charles, she had been quite cognizant of those frequent, cautious glances directed, as she would have said, “to her address.” Lisette’s address was immensely popular as a destination for glances, even if no more followed them. In this case, Jones had followed his glances,—that was all. He was “after her” and had consequently found her,—quite superfluous to inquire how. The thing,—the whole of the thing,—had happened to her before.

“You are to come with me at once, Miss Addenbroke,” said Marmaduke, rising. “It’s an unlucky mistake, of course, no fault of yours, but this is no place for you to be. I’ve explained downstairs, and paid them. Mrs. Shovell wouldn’t like it at all, you know. Come now,—I will answer questions afterwards.”

“Come?—where?” said Lisette, thoroughly amazed and faintly frightened at his manner. She resented such high-handedness, naturally; yet his words revived her fears. She had not had many, as yet, having been treated most skilfully by the man who had relieved her of Violet’s case. She had explained to him that she had taken it for a joke and meant to send it back, when she had worn the pearls once or twice, of course. He had quite understood, and been greatly amused by the jest; only he had warned her, in his careful foreign English, that it might be as well not to wear any of the contents, however prettily they matched her clothes, in the restaurant to which he was taking her that night. She had given in with a pout, and let him keep them safe, according to his idea, and free her hands.

“To the Langham Hotel,” said Jones calmly, mentioning the first conspicuous name that occurred to him. “I’ll see you have a better room there than this. That’ll

be better than a boarding-house for you, anyhow,—they're so stodgy." Seeing her instant agreement with his view of the case, he added easily, "I'll let your friends know where you are."

Lisette bit her lip. "Friends? Do you mean her,—Violet?"

"Yes. You're breaking promises, aren't you? You shouldn't have changed till to-morrow. She might send, or want to see you. They would have lost you altogether." He ignored the second valise on the floor, and its meaning, most utterly. He counted on her confusion and his own iron determination to snatch her from the coil. Her confusion was manifest, pitifully.

"I—didn't mean to," she stammered, her lip trembling a little more. "I wanted to have a drive with her to-morrow,—or Cousin Eveleen, one of them. I want to see the Park, you know,—that side. I didn't want to change." She looked not at Jones, but all round him, with her singular eyes. "I don't see why I should come with you, though," she added. "I don't know *you* specially. Who's to pay?"

"Not you, anyhow," said Jones. "I'll see to it."

"You're well off, aren't you?" said Lisette.

"Pretty well," he said, smiling. "I've enough for that."

"Don't laugh," the girl said angrily, and he instantly turned grave.

"You'll be all right there, Miss Lisette," he said. "Trust me."

"Oh yes," she murmured, still looking round him. "They all say that." Pity, wide and impersonal, swept over the man again. The idea of this lovely empty thing, on the world, alone,—it was inconceivable.

"You can't want to stay in a hole like this," he said, coming closer. "You don't, do you? It smells, and it's horrid. Why, you haven't even got electric light!"

"No," she murmured, "it's beastly; I said so." Then

she decided, with a flash of the recklessness which was her courage. "All right,—I'll come. I don't care. Big hotels are rather a lark. Only I'll write something to leave, you know, in case——" She failed to finish, and licked her lips with her little pointed tongue.

"That's it," said Jones, assenting in his most ordinary manner. "Only be quick."

"I shan't mention *you*," said Lisette, writing. "I'll just say I changed my mind, for fun. No harm in that, is there?"

"None," said Jones.

"I hadn't meant to come here, you know," she went on innocently. "But they don't take people at the other place for a short time, just a night or two. I have got to go over sooner to that place in Paris,—sooner than I thought. I've just heard. It put me out a bit." She was biting her lip even as she scribbled, glancing his way.

"That's all right," said Marmaduke, looking out of the window,—perhaps the flattest lie he ever told. He was devoured with impatience, though his aspect was as usual. She was a bad writer, evidently,—slow. In people whose natural expression was line-drawing, he had noticed it before. Thinking hard, putting himself in her place, he was beginning to get the "hang of" the circumstances.

Almost immediately after she had signed her name with a triumphant twirl, glad to get quit of it, he had another piece of evidence in his possession. A feather-head like Lisette was easy to deceive, which was as well, for Jones was not a skilled deceiver. As he followed her from the room, stooping to pick up her bag, he snatched with his other hand at the note behind him, and just captured it without turning. As he followed her downstairs, he slid it in his pocket carelessly. They both got away from the place without mishap, and leaving no traces, he trusted, behind them. He was sure at least of the hotel people, whom he had terrorized with powerful names.

When he had installed Felicia and her belongings in all

comfort at the big hotel in a cheerful quarter, surrounding her loveliness with a setting more appropriate to a "lady's" delicate needs; recommended her to the necessary attentions of the staff, with the necessary stimulus from his pocket; and talked to her cheerfully for a time to calm her nerves, which were on edge,—he left her, went to his club, and read the note. It was ill and hastily written, naturally, and aided him with neither name nor address, since it was a mere message left for the finder. But the fact, of course, that she left it, suggested friendly terms. In style it was familiar, since she was that to all the world. It witnessed to mischief and defiance, some relish in disobeying orders, but barely a hint of fear. It gave her new address, with exclamation points, frankly as to a friend: said the other place "stank" and she did not care for it, that her cousin had given her money, and she did not see why she should not spend it as she chose. This last was the lie which, according to Lisette's artless idea, protected Jones.

It had not occurred to Jones that he needed protecting, and it was some time before he perceived the full bearing of her attitude,—her conviction that in moving her he was playing for his own hand,—"going one better" than the other man. Why should he come after her, otherwise? Why should he "stick" her in that pretty room, and propose to pay her bill? He was simply bidding for her favor, and bidding in rather a successful manner, since Lisette loved comfort, and his rival had made a false move. But then, his rival was a foreigner, unused to London, hating all things English—except Lisette,—and exalting the wonders and glories of Paris which he should shortly show her. That was evidently the more effective course,—this was the immediately easy one. She would sleep on the choice, and meanwhile it was really very amusing to have two men wrangling over her.

In short, Lisette "jumped on Mr. Jones' cushion," to use Violet's little phrase. It was her kitten instinct to

do so, having investigated for a few short minutes with one of her pretty grimaces. There was a good prospect that her cousin, arriving in a smart carriage to-morrow, would offer her a better cushion still, and she could investigate the charms of that in turn. Of course, if this second man proposed to marry her,—she judged him as that kind,—it might be more amusing to be married than the best Violet or her mother could offer. Lisette liked dignity as well as comfort, and she had a weakness in favor of the married state. It was stately, if “stuffy” a little. Rags from her father’s ideas, and tags from her mother’s, filled Lisette’s foolish little head. She was half adventuress, half aristocrat, in the grain. Honoria’s trampling, ultra-modern theories impressed her at intervals, at least more than her aunt’s drooping sentiment and rigid propriety on the subject. She wrinkled her nose at matrimony at present, as at everything else, dubiously. She had never met the man with whom she would care to stop for long. She had got tired of the sight of Charles in two days, and was rather surprised at Violet for tolerating him. He was not Lisette’s idea at all. This Mr. Jones was extremely ordinary,—she had got sick of his features trying to draw him that day,—but he was, on the other hand, extremely amusing to tease, useful in emergency to turn to, and he had a long purse. It might be on the cards that he was worth taking, if only to surprise Violet in the letter with which she sent back the jewels. She would see, on the morrow,—if nothing happened.

She went to sleep in rather a good world, full of cushions; and the black tunnel, vaguely discerned at intervals, full of dim terrors, had receded.

Jones, meanwhile, reached the decision first, that he could do no more for the minute to help the girl in person: and secondly, that in Miss Lisette’s desolate situation women were, above all, necessary.

As to the first, he had no definite evidence before him that warranted him to set an official watch upon the man. He could not yet even be proved a thief, far less the more sinister thing Jones was after. He had nothing but appearances to go upon, which was no evidence at all. He might even be deluded by a common prejudice against a foreigner,—a prejudice of which, in himself, Jones was aware. Both he and Violet were acting on instinct purely in the matter, instinctive knowledge of the girl, realization of her amazing and evidently marketable charms, and the kind of covetousness they might produce. They had no case for a police court, absolutely none; nor reason to suspect worse than some furious lover, temporarily maddened by her beauty, following her in all honesty and for his love's sake alone. A complete stranger cannot save a girl from her lovers, especially a girl of breeding and high family, without impertinence. No man can do so. Women, even in that case, were still essential to his cause.

To make for women's aid was no more than a theory of Jones', as we have said, bred in him by early education. But he was shy of women in the walks of life, and preferred, where possible, to deal with them through their husbands. This is a peculiarity, not of Joneses alone, but of countless young men of his age, in all societies throughout the world. It is quite natural and defensible, but it led, in this case, to his first mistake: one may say to his first two serious mistakes.

His note to Shovell, just mentioning that he had heard from Miss Addenbroke her boarding-house was no go, and she had moved to the Langham by his advice, was the slighter error. It made Charles at the breakfast-table whistle,—happening to be seated alone there, for he had kept Violet, by force, in bed. Thus Charles whistled privately, and did not immediately tell his wife. It was really too disturbing to his late theories on the subject, that admirable Jones, acting on his own, should move Lisette to the Langham; yet it looked like that. It disturbed,—up-

rooted,—a private theory of Charles' as well as to the condition of admirable Jones' affections. It needed thinking over, and he had no present leisure to think. He put it off, and went to his office without telling Violet: not supposing,—since he had commanded her to stay in bed,—that she had any intentions on Lisette that morning. She had nearly worried herself ill about the girl as it was. If he had time, he might himself look in at the Langham and get news of Lisette during the lunch interval. This opportunity, it may be mentioned, did not occur,—or else Mr. Shovell forgot.

Jones' second mistake, of exactly the same nature, was more serious than this, though to his mind it was an extraordinarily obvious thing to do. Late on the same evening that he installed Lisette at the Langham, to make assurance doubly sure, a thing he loved to do, he went into a public telephone office, and rang up Sir Claude Ashwin. This constituted, of course, a ticklish and cheeky proceeding; but the matter was ticklish, and admitted cheek. It was better to "get on to a good man," in Jones' modest phrase; and one who was, at least by marriage, related to the lonely girl.

Jones "got on" pretty promptly to Sir Claude Ashwin's house, but not to himself. It was the secretary who answered, and the doctor was out. He would not be in till very late, probably. Was it serious?

"Dash!" said Jones,—not into the telephone, but the secretary happened to hear. He took it calmly, for he was used to that sort of remark, through this particular tube, at just such a juncture, daily.

"It's important and private," Jones observed to the telephone. "I'm the secretary of the S.P.X.Z. Know it?"

"Yes." Sir Claude's representative knew it well.

"Think I've written to you," observed Jones, as man to man. "You wouldn't remember, so never mind. Is Lady Ashwin at home?"

Lady Ashwin was, as it happened.

"Would she be so awfully good as to come a minute? Private matter, you know."

"Well,—I'll see." The secretary sounded dubious. As a fact, Mr. Ford, the secretary, knew that Lady Ashwin loathed telephones, and would be extremely angry at being disturbed for such a purpose at such an hour. He could if really necessary, of course, but—— He was a nice, easy-mannered young man, and liked things pleasant in the house. He waited a minute, and then, leaning to the tube, he said,—man to man, like Jones:

"I say!—I'm sorry, but Lady Ashwin's rather busy just now. If it's anything of *that* kind, better tell me, or Mrs. Shovell. That's the daughter . . . young, you know, but awf'ly clever and kind. I can give you her address, and she's at home. . . . Lately married," he added. "You'd be safe."

Safe! Another pause, in this unexpectedly romantic conversation. Two hearts, if the telephone operators had known it, were beating in full accord at either end of one of their wires: the hearts of two young gentlemen who had never met, and only corresponded once upon a perfectly indifferent matter. It was unheard-of as a coincidence, and would have made, in itself, a capital romance, if properly worked out and mounted adequately.

"Beastly sorry," said Jones back, after the pause, across the impenetrable barrier of the public wire. "Not that,—family matter, you know—urgent. Tell Lady Ashwin at once, would you awf'ly mind?"

"Right," said Mr. Ford, resigned.

After a pause,—a very long one, during which he was rung off, and on again,—Jones "got on to" Lady Ashwin, Mrs. Shovell's mother, surely a capital card to play, in a case like this. In the interval, he had been congratulating himself, though he felt shy a trifle, naturally. This was a lady of title, a real one,—not Lisette. Why, she was actually the bond of connection between Mrs. Shovell and Miss Addenbroke: she constituted the link: Jones had

made that out from Lisette's artless references. . . .
An excellent card,—even better than Sir Claude.

"Well, what is it?" said her ladyship, in a deliberate clear tone that carried well for telephone purposes.

Jones stated the facts very baldly: the facts of the girl's change of address, and that it was advisable she should be protected soon. "I thought it better to tell Sir Claude," he added simply.

Thank goodness Ford had had the sense to call her, thought Eveleen. Claude might have come in, and heard of it, and she would have had to go through all that again. Once in an evening was quite enough. What she said was—

"Are you the police?"

"No," said Jones, thinking it a most sensible question. She had evidently followed him, got all the way, and was, as evidently, one of the people who saved time. Just such a mother as Mrs. Shovell should have, and probably a person who acted promptly. "There's no need for that," he explained, "at least at present. I shall be glad to come round, Lady Ashwin, if you have a minute."

"Thanks, but I've heard about it," said her ladyship. "I had meant to go. It's only the address."

"Pardon," said Jones. "Three-seven, at the Langham, then; second floor. Is that all right? She'll do for the moment, but might be followed there. Catches attention, you know, too easily. The sooner the better to-morrow, I should say. I hope you'll excuse me troubling you."

"All right," said Eveleen, without exhibiting the smallest curiosity as to who he was. If the public telephone had developed a metallic voice and preached, Eveleen would barely have felt, and certainly not expressed, surprise. She was receiving a useful bit of information from somebody somewhere; that was all. Really, she began to want to have a look at this Lisette. Even the telephone,—vaguely representing London at large,—seemed to take an interest in her perilous attractions.

"Thanks. Then I can leave it to you?" said the telephone voice.

"All right," said Lady Ashwin again, and shut him off.

All right,—twice over,—and in the voice of Mrs. Shovell's mother, Sir Claude's wife, evidently a lady of few words, and deeds as prompt. Lisette was doubly all right, then, surely. So Jones went back to his club, where he was staying temporarily, reached his room, and having said his prayers (presumably) went to bed. The little jewel-case with its three letters, empty of its treasure, lay close to him on the table. It had reached home before him by special messenger, and lay awaiting him invitingly. Its leather scent, vaguely pleasing, had caught the scent of violets as vaguely, possibly from a late handkerchief within; so that to every sense it was sweet, for one night, to have it near.

V

Life promised complications enough to Mrs. Shovell those first days in her new home. Not that Violet minded that. It was deeply interesting, though unusual, the state of things in her house,—promising in every direction, but barely finished anywhere. Her father's intervention, though at the eleventh hour, had done marvels, as she expected; and her interior, very far from the chaos he had promised her, was already charming; but there was still immensely much to do, at least for an Ashwin born, with the critical instinct greatly over-developed, and a passionate love of abstract beauty and cleanliness, in a situation where it was really almost impossible to compass either. Fortunately, her small domestic staff proved kind and competent: one, transferred from the servants' hall of her father's house, being accustomed to "Miss Violet's" ways; the other a rosy little Swiss, very young, but tractable, and cheerful even to exaggeration, so that she amused them both.

Mrs. Shovell accepted breakfast in her room the first

morning, since Charles was a nuisance about it: but she was up and about as soon as he had disappeared; and in spite of the charms of her workmen, and their evident openness to reason when properly addressed and soothed, by ten o'clock she was on her way, in a carriage, to Lisette. She bore with her a note, just in case naughty Lisette should be out, containing a pressing though playfully worded invitation, on the part of her and her husband—she calmly faced the work of it—to come and stay with her, and help her finish off the house, until such time as she should have to go abroad.

Reaching the boarding-house, she was greatly rebuffed and startled at the news. Lisette had not come at all: and a gentleman had come inquiring for her, soon after she should have been there. Begging to know what sort of gentleman, Violet was informed he looked like one of those missionaries, but not a clergyman. More and more remarkable! The company Lisette expected seemed to be good,—Mr. Jones seemed to be wrong,—but why was Lisette herself not there to see her visitor? It was all very mysterious and annoying indeed, and she barely knew where next to turn.

She drove home, considering it. It seemed useless to do anything for the moment, or worry Charles at the office merely because she was worried herself. She reproached herself sharply, at intervals, for not having brought the girl home, in spite of Charles, the night before. It might perhaps have been accomplished if—well, if Charles had been a little different from what he was,—less domestic, let us say. His instincts were domestic in the extreme; more so perhaps than Violet's. This is a painful thing for a woman to confess, even to herself; and it is probable no one but Violet would have admitted it, had they seen her playing with her workmen that morning, and measuring her curtains with an anxious brow. She was capable of doing these things—very well—and thinking of Lisette simultaneously, that was all.

She looked forward to a day of mental torment on the subject of the girl, but very likely she was a fool. Lisette would write to her anyhow, she believed. So Violet dismissed her carriage at her door, and devoted herself to her workmen, who had all done wrong impulsively in her absence, with the very best intentions; and interpreted adroitly between the Scotch cook and the Swiss parlormaid, who—also with the best intentions—occasionally failed to understand one another; and planned out a Dutch garden for the spring-time, pacing about her tiny parterre behind the house; and tried to forget—in vain.

She proved right at least as to one thing. She was the one person who received a first-hand communication from Felicia. It reached her through the post at dinner-time, just after her father had left the house, Charles having that instant returned to it. He actually brought the letter in, with an idle comment on the hand that wrote it, which had evidently been in haste, to say the least. It maddened Charles above all that the doctor had just gone down his steps, beyond recall,—for Violet nearly fainted.

Her shocked face as she read the note brought him to her side instantly, and he shared it, one arm holding her up, steadying the shaking page with the other hand. His own calm was perfect, though his brow was set. The opening was extraordinary, and made him stare even more than she had done, before he proceeded to the rest.

“Haven’t you missed your pearls?” Lisette began in a childish, rather shaky scrawl. “I saw a man at the station with the box in his hand. I think it was yours. He took it away before I could stop him. I could not stop to tell you then; I had to get on. You won’t see them again, I think, he had a [*beastly*—erased] not a good face. Don’t have me to a police court, I did not see him enough. I swear it, Bible swearing. That’s all about it.”

Having thus declared it "all," she proceeded, the writing a little stronger, as though the feeling gathered force:

"Cousin Eveleen came in the carriage. We had a bit of a row, not a bad one. She does not tell lies, she is the other sort. Better than Aunt Agnes; I liked her rather. I'd rather anyhow people say what they mean. She gave me money to go home, but I shall keep it now. I thought she might take me for a drive; I asked. I always ask what I want [something erased]. I should like to come to you to stop, but not while he is there. I know he would be fit to curse having me; I told her so. She said it would not matter for a bit, but I said that was *rot*. Married, they all do mind. I like you best of any I have seen, anyhow. If Honoria comes and you set her after me [another black erasure, probably the place] I shall damn you all the same, Violet, like the rest. Bad word, do not show him; make him cross again. It's not worth it——"

And therewith a perfectly unreadable signature.

"That's lying," gasped Violet, pointing to the first part, "all that. Look at the writing even,—she is desperate. Only the end is true. . . . Not even a drive, though she asked for it! . . . Horrible of Mother,—oh, poor little thing! I would go now if—I did not feel so sick. . . . Can you get me a cab, my dear?"

"No," said Charles. "Not yet. All right, my sweet,—don't you move." He was bitterly anxious—not for Lisette. He hardly thought of Lisette.

"I have you," murmured Violet, her gray eyes looking immense in her white face. "And she's afraid—already. That man made her write, Charles. You understand? He's a foreigner—or he would have tried lying himself,—and better than that. She can't do it on paper. Poor baby. . . . She took my case, you know, the jewels. I did not tell you,—quite at once. I told Father,—what was necessary."

"Be quiet," said Charles angrily. "Don't talk. I'll

go when you're all right. You have to leave this to me." Yet every word she said, giddy as she was, was enlightenment.

"The address is on the paper, isn't it?" she asked, a hand across her eyes.

He assented, after a glance. It was the Langham paper: useless to tell Violet, of course, that he had known the address all day. The girl who wrote this was beyond addresses by now.

"Charles," she murmured, eyes closed, presently. "For five minutes, lying here, I have wished myself free. She would have come to me, when Mother failed. Yes, she would have come."

"Anybody would come to you anywhere," said Charles, —stupidly, really. He might have known she did not want that,—spoonfuls of sugar, when you are sick for another girl's pain.

"That is not what I mean," she said painfully. "*You* prevented her. It is that dreadful—Ingestre—knowledge of men."

"I know," he said doggedly. "But she's right. I wouldn't have had her here. I can't want her now. I dare say I should be better if I could."

Violet thought—"Jones could," but she did not say it. The thought merely crossed her languid mind, since she had been studying Jones quite lately, and forgot nothing, —unlike Charles. She wished Charles would leave her, with the impatience of conscious weakness,—not look at her, at least,—not kiss her above all. She could hardly bear it, thinking of Lisette,—yet a woman must bear.

"I can manage now," she said wearily. "Get the cab: I am coming."

"No, darling," pleaded Charles. "You can't,—it's no use,—she must be gone. She would never have written like that if you had a chance of reaching her. The post-mark is Victoria,—look. And anyhow you can't do it. Let me send for Sir Claude."

She shook her head. "Quite useless, that above all. I can't tell him a thing at present. I only thank goodness he was gone. Father must know nothing of this, please,—ever. Remember that. I can't think much, but that is clear. Mother understood,—I had told her." She shuddered so that he felt it. "The worst—she has ever done."

"Your father ought to know," said Charles. "About this, at least; you're ill."

"Nonsense," she said impatiently. "It is helpless fury, and remorse,—hands tied. Doctors can't cure that. It is life,—and the family. Get the cab."

He got it, and took her inside it, as need not be said. Violet, even in faintness, got her way.

"Stay there," he directed her shortly, at the hotel entrance. "I will go and see."

She obeyed, lying quietly in her place, glad enough not to have to move. Charles came back to her quite soon, and his face, rather grim beneath the lights, told his tale.

"Hopeless," he said. "Gone hours since." And then to the driver—"Home."

"Scotland Yard," said Violet, gently from weakness, but in her driest tone.

"That's been done already," said Charles. "Some sort of missionary, those people thought,—on the tracks of the gang, if it is one. I saw the manager—frightfully apologetic, but washes his hands, of course. They were off before eleven, and this other fellow came in soon after. He was primed apparently, just examined the servants, cursed a little, I presume, since they were cringing, and went straight off to the Yard. One of these societies probably,—there are heaps. He'll see to details best. But it's a poor chance I should say," added Charles.

"Odd," said Violet, low. "A missionary,—it must be the same." She thought of the woman of the boarding-house. "Still, I'd rather go," she added, rousing. "They might want help,—money."

"Well, you won't go to-night," said Charles. "Sorry,

my dear, but there are limits. I've not had my dinner."

To be sure, he was hungry: poor Charles. He had worked all day. "I'll go when I've seen you rest and feed," he added, relenting and humoring her. "I can find out what the second man was after if you like. But later,—no hurry about that. The manager said he had a list of all the trains. Those fellows are as keen as knives."

What fellows he did not define: the seething community who interested themselves in crime and the miseries that lead to it, most probably. Charles had not got society on the brain, like Jones. For the moment, the society of one was all he asked,—and he rather doubted if he had got her thoroughly. Still turned from him, her head back as though for air, and her fine hands clenched on the cushion at her sides, she wished to know if the man,—*the man*,—had been seen.

"Yes," said Charles curtly. "He fetched her. Looked all right, and took them in easily. He seemed in a hurry, they said."

He did not add that "the" man had been noticed by some of the staff to be in a towering rage. Exactly how much sympathy for Violet, and how much fellow-feeling for his own sex in the abstract, and their wrongs as regarded women's unreasonable behavior, prompted this reticence on his part, need not be asked. He felt injured at the moment, and in need of attention. He also wanted to turn her attention, by force if necessary, upon herself: since she was his, and worth six of Lisette. Six!—six hundred: he felt a touch of contempt for the girl, it must be owned,—though of course he was sorry. It was a hateful business, and he loathed that Violet should have to think of it. It was not that he believed there was anything to be done about it,—that a girl could do anything, above all: especially the girl who was his wife. Charles really represented, had he known it, the domestic priest, —a type found as often among male as female kind,—

lighting the holy fires on the hearth, his sanctuary, in a temple swept and garnished by his goddess' own hands. He wanted very sorely to retain those hands to his temple's services, and to kick this ugly intrusive thing aside,—the thing on which, turned from him, her eyes were fixed. There is much to be said for Charles' attitude, too; even from the wider social standpoint, it need not be utterly despised. She saw it very dimly, perhaps, among the pressing mass of thoughts that threatened to overwhelm her: and she did not find him purely selfish, or unreasonable utterly, though hard at the moment to bear.

"I am not ill, you know," she said, later in the evening, when it seemed necessary. "Father agrees I am particularly well,—a triumph."

"All right," said Charles grudgingly. He seemed to imply, his father-in-law might pretend to know about Violet, but he knew best.

"I am afraid you are rather silly about me," said Violet, making a discovery. "There will be a reaction, some day."

Charles thought this simply not worth replying to. He was finishing his dinner heartily, and she was on the sofa. She had made a certain pretense of eating to please him, but that was all, for her sickness had been no idle plaint. She was more capable of talking than of eating, a good deal,—she could always talk. The dining-room was the only one in the house that was finished completely, and they were practically living there for the present. Unlike many dining-rooms, it was a particularly charming place; not large, but elegant in its proportions, and in its decoration, evidently studied by authority in their absence. Indeed, Sir Claude, a person of theories, had chosen it for first completion, and concentrated upon it expressly. It was Father's opinion, Violet told Charles, that among the many departments of family life, digestion was not the least essential function,—and walls of that color helped.

She was decidedly amusing on the subject of her father and his cranks—physiological, artistic and otherwise. She laid the horror of Lisette aside, shelved her private emotions, and amused him, while he ate, with tales of her father and the workmen, as she well knew how. Something, either the color-scheme of the digestive dining-room, or Violet's confidences, seemed to have a happy effect on Charles. He recovered his temper with praiseworthy rapidity, and ate abundantly of everything. At intervals, he begged his wife not to talk, with much feeling; but between-whiles he approved her efforts, fed himself, and smoked.

Once or twice during that evening Violet thought of Jones again: exactly why she could not say: perhaps because Charles was so handsome and so hungry and so charming,—and so ridiculously fond of her. He was like a big Newfoundland dog,—nothing like either a sleuth-hound, or a plain black-and-tan terrier, looking out on life and man with a sensible and wary eye. The contrast was certainly very marked between the two young men.

It was useless to think of writing to Mr. Jones to-night that the moment had come, and the need, for him to go to Paris,—she simply had not the brains. She could not drag her thoughts along, nor clear their tangle sufficiently. They might not be in Paris,—there were other towns. Jones was in his comfortable home, down in Surrey, somewhere in the Leatherhead district, and it was too late; they must have crossed the sea,—Lisette must be on the further side, lost,—a tossing chip on the waves, in Paris, or some other great rattling, ruthless town. It was far too late. It would be silly to send Mr. Jones to Paris on no scent,—with no knowledge of trains or boats to guide him. He would probably, being so thoroughly sensible, refuse to go. It was better to consider Lisette dead,—negatively murdered by Violet's mother. A negative murder meant one accomplished by not doing

anything, and merely looking beautifully on at life,—by taking what came, by not fussing, in short. Violet had been perfectly aware, all the time she talked divertingly to Charles, that she was fussing,—like an Ashwin,—abominably.

Fruitlessly, too; she repeated to herself the futility, the vanity of dwelling on it even, as soon as Charles left her a moment, in the silence and shadow she adored. Alone at last, she could think more lucidly, and thinking, saw that he was right. There was nothing she could do,—prayer itself, had she been one who prayed, would not succor that lost child. Lisette was dead, sucked under, through everybody else's sin. . . . A corpse, white-bodied, in a shell,—not even with the small consolation of Violet's real pearls,—little Lisette of six years old, herself a pearl of beauty, exquisite and unmatched. . . .

"You're nearly asleep, my ducky," said Charles' voice, "and I loathe disturbing you again; but a man has just brought this."

He had turned up the light that he had snicked out soundlessly when he left the room more than an hour before. In the interval he had been out, seeking news, as he had promised. But he had discovered nothing to do that had not already been done by Lisette's unknown providence, a person whom everyone seemed equally unable to describe. Returning, with a virtuous sense of duty done, to Violet's side, he found her just as he had left her in the darkened dining-room; too drowsy, as it seemed, even to ask for news.

She traveled back to her senses slowly, and roused to the facts of life by degrees. The first fact, as usual nowadays, was Charles: his strong arm beneath her, and his lips against her hair. Violet had been in the hairdresser's hands that day, and had quite expected him to remark on the way one lock sat down on her head owing to Charles'

persistent attentions. But being polite and French, he had merely observed how Madame's hair had grown since he saw her.

Having recalled so much of the day's bewildering experiences, Violet woke a little more, took in the spoken words whose echo reached her, and realized, as her eyes grew used to the flood of light, that Charles' right hand was holding something in front of them,—an object her eyes knew well,—had known for years, familiarly. It was of leather, dry-scented, with three gold letters glinting under the light. She had had it since she was twelve, her father had given it her with the first and dearest of his three little jewels, chosen for beauty, not swagger, that she had lost.

"Lisette?" she queried, her brow wrinkling faintly as she gazed. For a wonderful moment she thought the nightmare a delusion, and Charles had found Lisette.

"I don't know," he said. "Shall we look inside?" He spoke as to a child, and pitifully. Then it was not so. Violet awoke.

"Not like that," she said, irritated by his fumbling, laying her clever hand over his. "I will see, thank you," she added, in her waking tone, steadily.

Charles' hand dropped at the hint. Her irritation and vagueness alike, both so unusual, brought home to him her real suffering. She was too tired even to act for his benefit now,—exhausted. Therewith the last shreds of his resentment vanished, and he recollected the obligations of friendship, which the more selfish passion overlays. After a second of watching her, he left her altogether, rose, and went to the hearth, turning his shoulder to give her the more privacy, while she opened what was within.

It was a most proper little note, on club paper, in a white envelope, without superscription of any kind. Violet unfolded the sheet on a natural assumption,—before she found the message was addressed to Charles.

"Dear Shovell," it began, in a hand with a certain commercial neatness, which she did not immediately recognize. After looking at Charles' back a moment, Violet read on:

"I found this thing on an omnibus, by a lucky fluke. I am not on to the other things at present, and the brute has dodged the police. I suppose you went to the Langham, like self, too late. I am taking the car over, on the chance. I will let you know, if any good, from the other end, or before that, if they stop. All the wires are pulled, anyhow, and he can't hide her easily. That's our chance. It is pretty bad, on the face of it, but she [erased] Mrs. Shovell need not quite give up. I will do what I can.

"Kindest regards.

"Yours very sincerely,

"E. M. JONES."

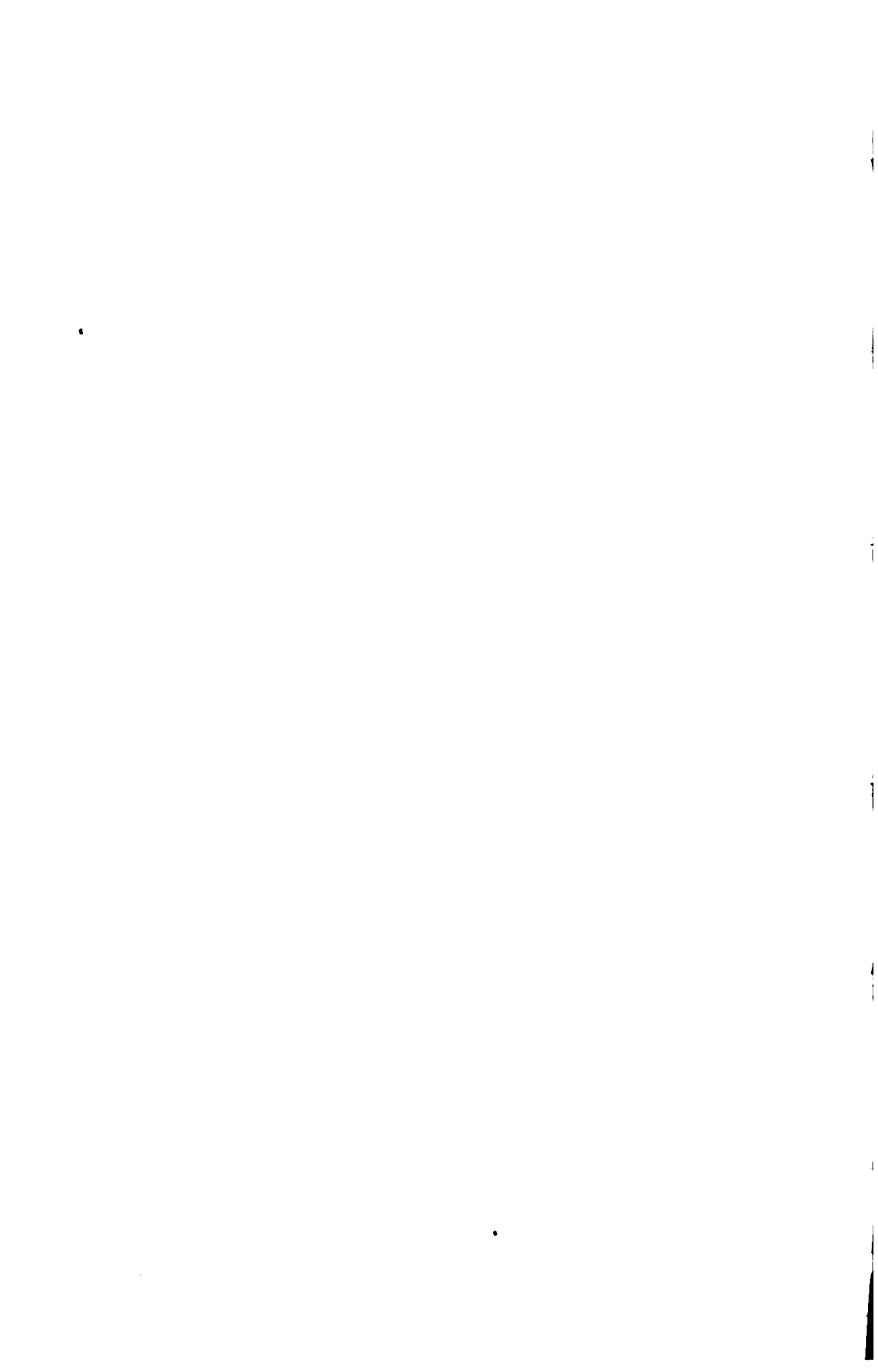
"It's the missionary, darling," said Violet, in a new tone.

Charles, turning about, found her hand extending his letter, and her gray eyes upon him, full of tears, but with a light behind that was not the light of amusement only. It was so deliciously like him, the E. M. Jones of their holiday game, to send a note to Charles, unaddressed, in Violet's property! Such business-like decorum, at such a juncture,—it was enough to make her laugh, while she cried at the kindness.

Real kindness,—the essential oil,—invariably made the Ashwins cry; but Jones' business note had not that effect on Charles. Reaching the end of it, he laughed shortly once, and stowed the letter away. The laughter surprised Violet a little, though by that time most of her thoughts were aloof, and following Marmaduke Jones to France, so she did not challenge it. It was as well, perhaps, she did not: for it was at the "she" erased that Charles had laughed: half in self-approval to find his private theory

supported by such evidence, half in amusement at the reflection he added to it,—that the little fellow must have been in the deuce of a hurry to allow that erasure to stand. It would have been more like Jones,—Charles' idea of him,—having made a slip as serious as that, to have written out the whole again.

PART II



I

THE INGESTRE ATTITUDE

I

LISETTE's frantic, furious little letter to her sister, sent from beyond the water, incompletely stamped, with neither address nor signature, and constituting in itself, short as it was, not the least ghastly document ever penned in the annals of her family, though there had been many such,—first paralyzed the little home at Torquay, and then, quite inevitably, shot round the Ingestre outposts, one by one. The news it contained went round, that is,—the note was burnt.

The family arose in their force. Even to keep the thing out of the papers effort was necessary, and there were claims far more serious than that. The Ingestres stirred, one might say, from the sleep of centuries, swore first,—naturally,—and then made inquiries. They even took steps. Mr. Ingestre of the Hall, a really tremendous person, though frail in appearance, and crippled with complicated gout, sent, in almost royal fashion, a flash of telegrams in all directions, and then came to London: a place which all his life had never seen him at such a season of the year before.

"If we had known——" was Claude Ashwin's simple response to all John Ingestre's unrestrained eloquence on the subject, when he sat in judgment in his cousin Eveleen's private room in Harley Street; and a shrug finished which conveyed the rest unsaid.

"It's the most sickening luck," said Mr. Ingestre. "Sickening."

He glared at Claude. He did not really blame him, naturally, since Lisette's flight had been secret, and her plans the plans of another, presumably,—that unnamed demon with the master mind, of whom all were thinking while mention was made of "the girl" alone,—it was only, as frequently, convenient to be angry with Eveleen's husband, since wrath was wasted upon her.

For it appeared that two letters, on the part of Eveleen, in the matter of Lisette, were not regarded by her cousin, and the family view he represented, as sufficient interference, in the earlier stage where influence might have served. Eveleen had been slack, her cousin John feared, in this matter. (He had noticed slackness in Eveleen, once or twice in her existence previously, but since she was a very lovely woman, he had usually laughed and let it pass.) She had been even culpably slack, since she was the person named in poor Addenbroke's will: though no talking on John's part seemed to make her see it. Her husband, of course, had the sense to be silent, though he listened to John's moral efforts in that quarter with a certain interest. John had known her all her life.

"You have got a motor," said Mr. Ingestre, looking beyond Claude to his cousin, who was pouting slightly, her head on a cushion, in a very comfortable chair. "Couldn't you at least have gone down to take stock of the situation, when you first heard,—heard the girl was bucking dangerously like that, I mean? You must have known Agnes—*qua* Agnes—would mucker it. She always does."

"It's such a way," murmured Eveleen, her eyes on John Ingestre's tie. "Of course I knew Agnes would," she proceeded, "if there was a chance. But I'd an idea Honoria had sense: I am sure they always told me so. They bored me to death about Honoria's brains, when I first went down there, before she went to college. What's the good of brains if you can't use them?"

"I'm not saying anything for Honoria," said her

cousin John, "Lord knows. It's a lasting moral against this training of women's brains at the expense of their common sense and natural feeling. Lord only knows, I don't defend Honoria. But she's the worst sufferer, after all. We ought to——"

"The worst?" said Claude, snapping his fingers once upon the table.

Mr. Ingestre, thus gracelessly interrupted, glanced at him and left a pause: perhaps ashamed a trifle. Eveleen glanced too at her husband's face, and saw his impotent fury,—not, she was happy to observe, with her. He was furious, as always, at knowing of a thing too late that he could conceivably have remedied. Of course, now, it was far too late, at this point when the hateful outrage reached his ears. Claude looked extremely, exaggeratedly, unhappy and ashamed, as he sat in his wife's beautiful sitting-room, at her unique Sheraton table, hearing of it. He might, judging by his looks alone, have been solely responsible for the tragedy,—if John had not known he had been enlightened, for the first time, during the last few hours.

"I told Violet——" began Eveleen.

"What?" said her husband sharply.

"Well, she was down there, just before it all happened, close to them. At least, not so far away. I never remember exactly if Torquay is in Devonshire or Cornwall, but it's much the same. I said Agnes was in a way, and Violet might as well go over, if she had a chance, and see. Not that she would have been any good," added Eveleen. "But she didn't."

Both men looked at her, endeavoring to get to the bottom of this lucid statement.

"Poor little Violet,—on her wedding-journey! I'm glad she did not," said John. "You would hardly have countenanced that, Claude, would you? I know these up-to-date girls,—but still!"

"Well, Agnes seemed to think her better than nothing,"

said Eveleen impartially. "With Honoria, of course, I mean. I don't suppose she could have dodged Lisette. Nobody, anyhow, could have dodged Lisette, if she was set on her own way. We had her here once,—they came together for the Welbys' dance. She was sixteen,—I noticed then. Don't you remember, Claude?"

"I remember very well," he said, looking down. Was it likely any man with his senses awake would forget beauty like that? Only the young Eveleen Ingestre, to his mind, had ever equaled it,—he had compared the two at leisure, then.

Claude was trying hard to think, always a difficult business in mixed Ingestre society. John was well-meaning, but he had, so to speak, only one plane of thought. One had to remain on that level steadily, or one might misunderstand him, and lose one's temper unaware. It was the scandal that mattered really to John, the degrading scandal,—not the girl. As for Claude's wife, she laid, or appeared to lay, her impressions before the company freely, and looked sublime in the intervals. That was as far as Eveleen ever went, in strictly male surroundings, so he expected nothing more useful. Her secretiveness about the origins of the thing,—the point where work and intervention might have served,—was characteristic too. Yet perhaps if he had not let her drift so far apart from him she might have mentioned something,—hinted at least, so that he could have evolved the rest.

"I expect Charles prevented Violet," he said, after the pause,—the kind of conversation, being so fruitless, is largely pauses,—“quite right. She would have only run her head against the wall, that is if I remember the girls at all correctly. The elder would need—er—something more strenuous than soothing.”

Eveleen laughed: and John said,—“Meaning, a man?”

“A man, of sorts,” said the doctor cautiously. “Qualities of temper are needed.” He paused, and added,—“Charles himself might have done something, if properly

posted. You have not met Charles, John. He's the right type for it, equable,—and above all, healthy. The crisis was unhealthy essentially,"—the medical disgust came through. "Shovell might have lightened the atmosphere a bit," he finished, "and he'd have kept his head."

"All you know," said Eveleen. "And it wasn't Charles' business, anyhow."

John, by his short grunt, seemed to agree. They were equally inclined to keep the scandal within the family ring, and seek an offender there. That, Claude supposed, was why they had all settled on Honoria. His wife, he noticed, was particularly vicious on the subject of the elder girl. Honoria made the mistake, of course, of being in the family, but not of it,—a white blackbird in the brood. Being now shamed by her sister's conduct, with her newly-attached lover backing away from her, in equal suspicion and alarm,—Honorina had, they could not avoid thinking, her deserts. She had no right to marry, so to speak, at poor foolish little Felicia's expense. A girl of sense, with the proper instincts, ought to have seen to it that Lisette married decently first,—it was not as though there could have been any lack of chances. Honoria could easily have picked up a husband herself later,—Ingestres almost invariably did. That was John's view: and Eveleen would doubtless have shared it, if she had had it stated slowly, and been given time to take it in.

"Why on earth didn't the poor little creature come to us?" said Claude, his head in his hands. "That's what I cannot see. Come, or send at least, if she found herself in straits. She has been here, she couldn't have forgotten the address: we did our best for her on that occasion. And she must have passed through town,—unless they crossed from Southampton? To be sure, the school was there. Has anybody aired that theory, John?"

"No," said Mr. Ingestre. "She undoubtedly came through town, and stayed at the Langham,—her name is on their books. She may have assumed you were out of

town,—your habits are your own, Claude, I may mention: but it's likely the other was with her, and stopped it. Lord knows. I shall go to the Langham this afternoon to get what I can, but I fear it's little good. All the scents are stale, and the police at fault: though I hear some private workers are worrying at it." After another of the hopeless pauses, he pursued,—“She wasn't in straits at that point, at least: it's an excellent hotel. He was probably playing her, and treating her about. She can have had no suspicions. Why, she could have telephoned to you from there, if she had really——”

“Just so,” said Claude, catching him up, “or to Violet. Violet must have been home by then. What was the date you said, John? Let me see.”

“Hold your tongue,” Eveleen observed to him, low and sharply, as the secretary Ford came in. Claude, whose head was still in his hands, looked up surprised, and Mr. Ingestre's eyebrows lifted slightly. But no one spoke for a minute, as was natural.

“I beg your pardon, sir,” said young Ford to his chief, blushing and rather astounded at the crushing silence which greeted him. Even in a domestic conclave, he thought, one does not need to shear it off so completely as this. And Ford had attended many conclaves, some of quite a peculiar nature, in this house.

“What do you want?” said Eveleen, just as though he had been a servant, thought John.

“Come in,” said Sir Claude, beyond her, quietly. “We are only ash-picking over this wretched affair. I forget if you know Ford, Ingestre. I think you must have met.”

That was more like it, thought Mr. Ingestre, as he shook the youth by the hand. John liked to have things decent, at least outwardly. Really, even in the presence of persons who knew the domestic situation, Eveleen's snub to her husband had been so vicious as to be barely in good taste; not less her remark to the secretary, patently a good fellow, and a University man. Her sharpness suggested,

in John's view, some nervous strain on Eveleen's part: and John was perfectly right. The dialogue had sailed much nearer to the wind, in the last two speeches at least, than Eveleen liked. She had no wish at all for Claude to think out dates, a thing for which he had a positive genius: or to consider too keenly how far his daughter might have been involved in Lisette's tiresome affair; nor, above all, did she want John to maunder of telephone messages, in the unwelcome presence of Mr. Ford. These contingencies must be avoided, by rudeness if necessary. So Lady Ashwin was rude—sublimely.

It was noticeable that, after the first shock, nobody thought much of it.

"I'll come at two if I must," said Sir Claude, in the most unprofessional manner, to his secretary's correct and low-toned information. "But it's not necessary, and I don't want to. 'Phone that to Lady Gertrude, in your best style. And I know I am later than I said, but Mrs. Shovell must wait. Keep her going for ten minutes, Ford, would you mind, down there. You can talk about musical glasses, or something of that description, can't you? We don't want her bothering here, as it happens."

"Oh, I say," remarked Mr. Ingestre, turning. "I do."

"Better wait," said Claude, with a glance at him. "She's dining to-night, isn't she, Evie? Or merely hired to do the flowers and the fruit?"

"Don't be absurd," said Eveleen. "If she wants to, I'm sure I don't see why she shouldn't. I told her she might just as well do the food as well, while she was about it,—since John is here, and she remembers what people eat. Or rather don't. I never do."

John's satiric mouth twisted, for, like most men who have been in their time good livers, he objected to having the exigencies of a diet made public property. But, as it was merely Eveleen, he said nothing violent; he only grimaced passingly, and took stock of the new-comer while he waited among them, easily, for orders.

"I suppose," Eveleen pursued, addressing Claude apparently, though she did not look at him, "if Violet wants you to walk, she's finished. Has she?" Her fine eyes fixed the secretary, who was perfectly used to the most anomalous duties in her establishment.

"I gathered," said Mr. Ford, very modestly, "Mrs. Shovell had been promised some information as to something—shades, I think,—which is not forthcoming, and is stuck for want of it."

"Let her stick," Sir Claude intervened in a flash before his wife could speak. "She's my guest to-night, and I won't have it. Tell her that. Send the shades to the underworld, where they probably belong. Stick her on the study table, and divert her mind. Tie her hands if necessary, Ford. I have to depend on you."

The secretary, keeping his face admirably, though his color was a little high, retired and shut the door.

"Nice young fellow," commented John Ingestre. "Good choice you London fellows get,—mine's a beast. . . . I oughtn't really to keep you, Claude. I suppose you have all the world to do. The only thing left is—I wanted to pick your brains a bit about the missions, societies and so forth, that deal with these things,—but that'll bore Eveleen, won't it? We had better put it off."

They both looked at Eveleen, hoping she might see she had to go. She did not, only settling more comfortably under their eyes. It was, she would have argued, her own room, though it also happened to be the most private spot in a very busy house. So John proceeded, hoping to weary her.

"I'd no idea those people ran their noses into messes like this so promptly. On my word, it's rather smart, according to what the inspector told me yesterday. One of them was across almost as soon as she was,—must have been, I mean. And he's still hanging about, over there, watching the tracks."

"Happen to know the society?" asked Claude.

Oh dear no,—Mr. Ingestre never remembered such things. The inspector had used a string of letters, of course. “I no more remember ’em,” he said pleasantly, “than I remember the dozen or so you carry after your name. And I doubt whether Eveleen there could repeat those, if she was put to it.”

“Good gracious no,” said Eveleen, full length in her chair. “The only result of that sort of thing is, he’s out nearly every night.”

“I can’t see how that follows,” said John, after conning it. “Can you, Claude? Societies, does she mean? Meetings? Eveleen, what *do* you mean?—do tell us. Sometimes, we really want to know.”

But Eveleen was vexed,—one might have said agitated, if such a thing were possible. She had not yet got over the jar of Ford’s untimely entrance,—she did not reckon in life for such outrageous and unjust coincidences. It ruffled her so that she could not even flirt lazily with John, who from the age of seventeen or thereabouts had always been ready for the exercise. So having revenged herself by teasing and interrupting the busy pair for a period, she left them to their private conversation, much to its advantage, and theirs.

Claude, when he finally reached the study, found his daughter and Mr. Ford sitting upon the table, as directed, side by side, with their hands clasped about their knees, and their heads rather near together, talking with energy low-toned. They were old comrades, and good friends,—and Mr. Ford was resigned. That is all that need be mentioned about their situation. It is not exclusive of agreeable intercourse, on the subject of musical glasses, or any other artistic topic that happens to crop up in London in September. Their present attitude on the table witnessed to this consolatory fact in life.

As father and chief made his appearance, they simultaneously leapt off the table, and tried to look relieved.

"Thank you," said Sir Claude, glancing at his secretary's face. "I trust she has proved tractable."

"Very fairly," said Mr. Ford demurely. "Only looked five times at her watch."

"I did not," said Mrs. Shovell, coloring. "I was looking down at my hands, and happened to see it, that's all. Only *really*," she added, turning breezily about, "I have a *little* wasted my morning with all of you! You ought to have a waiting-room here for daughters, Father,—or at least a wooden chair in the hall. I have not touched the piano,—I was growling to Mr. Ford. He will have to do the whole of the concert this evening, every bit. As for Mother, I simply give her up. Mason was nearly crying, and all the others were cross. I tried to console them, but I have done nothing in two hours, really,—nor have they. And it's not as if I hadn't things at home."

"I am sorry, darling," said her father, with genuine remorse. "I suppose Ingestre's sudden descent has upset your mother, rather. I am really vexed about it,—I think I conveyed as much. She has no right to ask you, and Charles has every reason for complaint. In future, Pussy, I shall see to the shades myself,—granted Ford will discover for me what they are."

Mrs. Shovell laughed,—at herself, as was evident; and after an instant, approached and took his arm. She had lost her temper frankly, and as frankly recovered it. The Ashwins had tempers, though they held them in control; they could not have owned such a store of hot feeling otherwise. To-day Violet's tiresome nerves were teasing her a little, on more counts than one; for her cousin John was particular both as to his meats and his music; her mother's household, which she had been calmly requested to manage on short notice, was thoroughly out of gear;—and she knew she would be asked to play. Mr. Ford, alone in a hard world, had been sorry for her,—because musical people know. She had asked at some length on the table, and briefly received, his sympathy. Having that

and her father's apology, she felt somewhat armed against fate and the future. Now she held out her hand.

"I beg everybody's pardon," she observed, "for letting fly. I expect I have been detestable, but I will go home and reform before the evening. I will brush up my manners with my best shoes. I must have interrupted you most horribly," she added, with evidently false compunction and a charming smile.

"Most completely," said Ford, looking back with equal meaning. "Really, I forget what I was doing when you came in."

"Oh, I can tell you," said Violet kindly. "You were standing at the window, looking out. Dog fight, I think, by the sounds. And the telephone-bell was ringing, persistently, in the background."

"Did he attend to the telephone," asked her father; "after you came in, I mean?"

"Yes, Father,—instantly. I seemed to remind him of his duties. I am rather like you, they say. Personally, I could have settled Lady Gertrude in half the time. They had a long, interesting, intimate conversation. I heard her quacking voice. I think," she added dreamily, "a telephone to all the nice houses in London is a great embellishment to a room. It certainly lends variety to the cloistral life."

"A comfort to hear her words again, isn't it?" said Sir Claude to the third party, with a smile. "We miss things like 'cloistral' nowadays. They hardly ever crop up, in our common speech,—especially like this, in working hours."

"We miss more than that," murmured young Ford; and being capable of taking a hint, he sat down, with an air of purpose, to the table.

"Ford is a great consolation to me," remarked Sir Claude, just not outside the door, as he passed through. "His sympathy is so unforced." When he was quite outside, dropping all raillery, he added,—“Puss, can you pos-

sibly do without my young man this evening? Your mother seems curiously set against it. I cannot make it out, and I don't know how to tell him, really. I know," he added in the fatherly tone, "that it will break his heart."

The girl looked at him a minute. "Has Mother taken against him?" she said. "Why? He has never been anything but kind and attentive to her."

"I know; but it is the fact. Useless, probably, to go into it. Could you not play alone? Ingestre so loves your playing,—so do I."

"Father darling,—it isn't that," she said after a minute, with an effort. "I feel Mother should not be humored in these things. It is not even good for her,—it is unnatural. Someone must make a stand about it, really. Must I?"

"No," he said unhappily. "Because that will mean teasing for you, won't it? In the case, unpleasant teasing, I imagine." Violet was silent. "We must think of some other way."

"You mean something insincere? A piece of unexpected business cropping up at seven o'clock, and so on,—I won't bear it, Father. Hubert Ford is a friend. He has never been anything but sincere to me. He is incapable of concealing—anything. I cannot bear that sort of thing, you know; it is injustice, unkindness too. I shall tell Mother what I think."

"I wish," said Claude thoughtfully, after another silent space of walking, side by side, "you had not always to be sacrificed. It seems quite unfair."

Indeed, such little deceptions as he had proposed were one of the many miseries of the domestic situation, over the constant problems of which they now talked almost freely. One would have thought often, overhearing their cautious talk upon the subject, that the wife and mother who was the center of all problems was diseased, or chronically infirm. So she was, to the delicate, fastidious Ashwin standards; but the condition led frequently to shame and discomfort for them. Violet had always, where pos-

sible, spared him such small humiliations, and he was driven, more as time went on, to let her suffer them in his stead. On the present occasion, he felt incapable really, on thinking it over, of going to "his young man," who had nearly broken an excellent heart for Violet, and telling him, even in the most adroit manner his own ingenuity could suggest, that he was not to see her at dinner that night. It seemed too hard,—unjust, as Violet said. So he left it to his daughter's wits, as usual.

II

"Hullo!" remarked Mr. Ingestre. "We're the first."

Violet, who had not noticed him in his chair, for the drawing-room lights were low, started.

"We are simply a family party, Cousin John," she explained in the distance, rather shyly.

"So much the better," said Cousin John.

Mrs. Shovell had slipped into her mother's drawing-room, just to see that all was well in that department, having reviewed exhaustively all the others. She had come early for the purpose, on her own account, and nobody else was dressed. She had supposed not, that is; she was not prepared to see the head of the Ingestres, the center, so to speak, of all her cares, sitting ready and lonely in his chair. Having stopped short at the sight of him, secretly vexed, she came on with decision, stripping off the pinafore she wore to protect her dress, and adding to her whole demeanor as she advanced the stateliness of the married woman. She had been in her old incarnation, child and fag of the household, only the instant before, and her cousin John's amused eyes witnessed the change. He had only seen her once in youth, and a passing glimpse of her at the wedding, but he liked her, as he liked Claude. He held out a hand invitingly.

"Come and kiss me, little girl," he remarked.

"That's not the way to address me, Cousin John," observed Violet, folding up the pinafore. "Just because

you dress too early, and happen to catch people in mufti, you oughtn't to take liberties. I have all my war-paint underneath. Besides, I am not on the premises at present: I arrive with my husband, later." As she threw aside the pinafore with easy grace, she added,—“I had to do the flowers at the last moment, because Mother would not settle the shades finally before. I have been at her all day on the subject, fruitlessly. Mother has a perfectly noble way of putting off.”

Mr. Ingestre laughed for all answer at this tirade, and drew her to him.

“My, what pearls!” he said, when he had been kissed. “Here, kneel down; let me see.”

The elders of that house had a fine, rather historic, manner of treating the younger women like chattels: things to their pleasure and at their command. They combined it with the most elegant civility on state occasions, and the younger women got used to it. Violet laughed and knelt down, while her mother's cousin fingered the pearls in turn, examining. He had fine pointed fingers, and he was extremely careful, as he did so, not to touch her neck. He looked in her eyes, though,—not Ingestre eyes, but very pretty ones.

“What have you been crying about?” he said simply, holding her by a pearl.

“Nothing.” A pause. “Mother made me cry.”

John Ingestre showed no surprise. “Did she box your ears, or what?” he inquired, resuming his investigations.

“Cousin John!”

“Well, she did mine once. I'm sure I'm glad to hear it,” he added courteously. “I shouldn't like them to be boxed.”

“She has never beaten me—yet,” said Violet, her tone unsteady. “This evening something has gone wrong. That's all. I dare say it will be better after dinner. Will you let me go, Cousin John?”

“No,” he said, half to himself. “This is a chance of

chances, really. Violet,—did she see Felicia when she passed through town?"

The blushes surged up, as he saw by the dim light: the girl was gasping, as he felt. "No," she said.

"That's a lie," said John pensively. "Did you see her yourself?—Don't be nervous, my dear. I'll not hurt you or her. Eveleen's a woman in a thousand—immune. You must know that."

"I know it: I only—had not expected this. Won't you allow me—time to think?"

"I'm frightening you," he said, still pensively. "It's a horrid business, certainly. Did she drag you in?"

"Yes," said Violet. There was really nothing for it; and easy almost to familiarity as his treatment was of her, on the broad lines Cousin John Ingestre was all right. He was a perfectly courteous gentleman, with the conviction in him, ages old, that women, if sufficiently beautiful, may be as heartless and as mischievous as they please. Eveleen, as he said, was immune. She had knocked even the Ingestre standard down in looks, and, in her marriage, had broken new but excellent ground, with a courage all her relations of sense now openly admired,—though they had been intensely disagreeable at the time.

"How did you find out?" said the girl after a minute.

"By a chance. I happened to go to the hotel. The people there recognized your mother. She didn't give her name, but she was recognized," said Mr. Ingestre, as though the fact pleased him. "She couldn't disguise herself, Eveleen, if she wanted to,—and she doesn't."

"No," Violet agreed. She told him, simply and shortly, what she knew. It was a relief to tell anyhow, and to a person who was safe.

"It's—Father," she added.

"Yes, just so. Father shan't know. Shouldn't wonder," said John thoughtfully, "if he'd turn her out if he did. He's been pretty near it before now. What do you say, Mrs. Shovell?"

"I had thought of it," she said, looking him in the face composedly. "It's a thing Father minds so much,—so terribly, Cousin John."

"Yes, I saw that. Don't wonder, I'm sure, with such a nice little girl of his own."

This civility on Mr. Ingestre's part was absent, for he was thinking. "I'll make no mischief between 'em," he said finally. "But you ought never to have been let in. That's shocking, really. I don't like that. Does your husband know?" The girl nodded, silently.

"Tell him—that's right," said Cousin John, looking at her eyes again. "Don't cry," he said. "Shovell's a good name. Sounds all right, anyhow."

"It *looks* all right," said Violet, laughing through her tears. "It appears very nice indeed. I assure you it goes further than sounding."

"And feels all right, eh?" He touched her chin. "Looks after you? That's well."

"Do you know," said Violet presently, still kneeling by him, "you always make me feel mediæval. Fair Ellen or somebody, in Scott. I noticed that feeling too about the Hall. I don't wonder the mere look of your house inspired us to run away from it romantically."

"I hope you'll run away to it, and soon," said Mr. Ingestre, very calm. "Christmas is a good time,—things pretty lively." He did not, however, accept the change of subject. "Now let's see," he pursued, "how much has your father really reached of this hateful business. Anything?"

"Nothing to speak of: he has hardly turned his mind that way. He is so frightfully busy, you know. I think," said Violet, frowning, "that I can manage that he doesn't, anyhow,—though it is harder, not being in the house. He is so quick, you know, at a hint. Still, I think in this case, Mother will be careful."

"Who's to have Honoria, when she comes?" said John, after 'fresh reflection. "That's danger, of a sort."

"I had thought of that. I will have Honoria,—it won't be just at present, anyhow. She is ill with the horror and disappointment, poor dear thing. . . . I wanted to ask you, Cousin John. You will not worry *them* about it yet? You will let them have a mourning-time? You know it is far, far worse than death,—to us." She bit her lip.

"Yes: that's true." John was silent. He had meant to be "at" Honoria; he had even written a letter; but the girl was right. The letter should not, at least at present, be sent. He came back to Eveleen's case, after a minute. "Anyhow, when she comes," he said, "she must be kept off your mother. Honoria has lost her man,—she'll be frantic. If anything got out, you know,—there would be Hell's own row." He paused and added gravely, "I beg your pardon, Violet."

"I know what you mean," she said.

"I'm sorry you do," said John. "Well,—is there anyone besides your father might get at it? In the house, I mean. What about the man who drove her, for instance? I suppose she drove round."

"Joliffe is exquisitely discreet," said Violet. "He is used to driving Mother."

"Good," said John, smiling. "Nobody else?"

"Yes. There is Father's secretary, Mr. Ford. He knows she was rung up, on a family affair, that night. And he knows Lisette's tragedy, from Father. He is perfectly safe, really, if only Mother would believe it. But she obviously doesn't,—I have seen to-day."

"So have I." Mr. Ingestre remembered the morning's incident. "Well,—who's got the secretary in hand,—you?" He touched her chin again.

"It's not necessary," said Violet firmly, "I assure you. Mr. Ford is perfectly, absolutely the right sort. As good as Charles."

"Dear, dear," said Mr. Ingestre in a tone Mrs. Shovell chose to disregard. She looked over his gray head, stead-

ily. It was, as she would have said, a question of fact, not opinion, whether a young man was the right sort or not. Besides, Cousin John ought to have known on sight,—and did. He was only tiresomely teasing, as ancient relations do.

"Your dear mother will get Mr. Ford turned off," remarked Mr. Ingestre, when he had amused his eyes for a time. The girl must certainly come to Ingestre Hall at Christmas, he decided. She would be an acquisition. "I don't set up to be a prophet, my fair Ellen: but that's what will happen next."

"Oh no, it won't happen," returned Violet. "You little know Father, saying that. Father loves him dearly. Mr. Ford has learnt all Father's most peculiar methods, and snubs his worst women without huffing them, and stands his viciousest snaps without offense. You would really say Mr. Ford liked to be pounced upon by Father,—that it did him good, somehow, inside. He just sits in the study enjoying it, and writing neat little notes. I am perfectly certain, much as Mother may compass in life, that she will never compass separating those two."

"How beautiful," said Cousin John, properly impressed. "Is this paragon coming to-night?"

"He is,"—the girl blushed a little,—"because you like music, don't you? Mr. Ford is a musical person,—had you guessed? I dare say that is why he is so harmonious in a house," added Violet. "He has always chimed in pleasantly, from the first. I thought you would like some music, after dinner. I told Mother so, firmly. I was young when you came before, but that is a thing I don't forget."

"And what did Mother say?" said John. "Did she chime in pleasantly, hey?—Ah, just look at me, Violet," he added. "Was that the row?"

"That was the row," the girl admitted. "It was not much of one, really. Anyhow, I thought it would be very marked to leave him out, our first meal in the house."

Charles and I have hardly seen him. . . . You do like music, don't you?" she added, timidly rather.

"I do," he said. He lifted her hand to his lips as he spoke, with the ease of a past school. "I wish I could rise," said Mr. Ingestre. "I am certainly not worth a single tear. You are a sweet little girl, worth a dozen of her, really."

He was really touched, and held her hand in silence till Charles came in. Hospitality,—true hospitality,—was a thing these Ashwins knew. He seldom stayed in a house where he was better treated. And he knew enough of Eveleen to be convinced that the credit did not lie there.

When Charles came, John looked at him very critically, but certainly, to the eye, he stood such fire well. He "looked all right," and more: he looked comely, and seemed kind to her. The head of the Ingestres,—who really had no claim whatever to Violet,—was content. Then came the other nice young fellow, Ford, and John watched the three together pensively. He liked young people, and their ways; and these three were friendly and pleasant,—and made room for him. Cousin John very much liked to be made room for, and was very content to pay with flattery when he was. He flattered, till the husband turned huffy, and grew short with him; and that amused him still more.

It struck him, the girl kept the two in play so expertly, that if it went on at that rate, her mother would be vexed. This slid into Mr. Ingestre's mind as a natural conception; and he was right, as usual. Eveleen was vexed: far less loftily composed than usual,—it was true she had hardly been herself all day; and she came in consequence as near as her cousin had ever seen her to being outshone. An awful danger loomed in front of Eveleen,—a doom that fatal evening foreshadowed. Young as she looked still, one dared not call it age. It was eclipse. . . . Outshone by her own daughter, in her own house;—con-

sidering how she had always treated the daughter, it was rather hard on Eveleen, certainly.

Mrs. Shovell, who had evidently forgotten that she had dressed the dinner-table lately, in a pinafore, wore her bridal satin, and went in on her father's arm. That, it struck John, was how he had seen her last, only on this occasion one could see her face, which was an advantage. It was clearly, though so small, something of an occasion: at least she rose to it with great dignity. But conversation with such a company could not abide by the strict rules. Half-way through dinner, John, who should have been talking to his cousin, leant back at leisure, and reckoned it out.

They were four men and two women: good allowance for the women—two to each. Well,—Claude and his daughter played together capitally,—far too pretty an exchange of love and liveliness for anyone to want to detach Claude. That was one. . . . The son-in-law, on Lady Ashwin's other hand, was fair game for Eveleen,—very fair game: the kind of lad she had always liked, and, what was more, she liked him obviously. Well,—he did nothing whatever but watch his wife, manoeuvre for her notice, and glare sidelong at young Ford. That was two,—Mrs. Shovell's strict allowance. . . . Next, there was the secretary, unpretending nice young man, plumped down right opposite the girl, cut off from his hostess by jealous Charles. Well,—what do you expect? That was three to the daughter. . . . There was, finally and insurmountably, Mr. Ingestre himself. Well—John suddenly remembered Eveleen, and turned back to her. And he had admired Eveleen, you know, between you and me and the bedpost, married and unmarried, all his life. Well—in short, there you were!

And to crown all, by every right and tradition known to the stock, all four men should have been Eveleen's.

This perfectly Ingestre summary of the Ashwin dinner-party is offered to the reader respectfully, as far bet-

ter than any less refined intelligence could even attempt. It gives the whole thing in a nut-shell, and accounts, abundantly, for Lady Ashwin's resentment. She made her daughter cry before dinner: and at dinner, all unaware, her daughter paid her back.

"She's a little beauty," remarked John to Eveleen, just to see what she would say. "I'd no idea you had a pretty daughter."

"Nor had I," said Eveleen indifferently. "I suppose you've seen Violet before."

"Oh yes,—in the nursery; and under yards of chiffon at her wedding. You do call it chiffon, don't you? Anyhow, it's a good disguise. I never yet saw a girl look well at her wedding," said John thoughtfully, "I suppose the strain's too great."

"You saw me married," said Eveleen.

"Ah—no, I didn't. I turned round."

Lady Ashwin's fine eyes fell on her daughter a moment. "Violet's been crying," she said.

"I know," said John Ingestre. "And I know why. Feeling goes for something, I dare say," he added. "Is that what you meant? You never had much feeling, Eveleen." A pause.

"You don't know why," said Eveleen, who had taken in the first sentence completely. "Violet wouldn't have told you."

"Wouldn't she? I might know without. What do you bully a girl for, who's perfectly loyal to you, and serves you the whole day long? Rank bad form, I call that,—would be, for a man."

Another pause. "What are you after, John?" said Eveleen: the question she asked so commonly, of all the world. She seemed really rather curious.

"I'm after a criminal," said Mr. Ingestre, as quietly, "and rather a low breed. But I don't expect to look for it in my house."

That much, he thought, she deserved: though he doubted greatly if she took his meaning in. He wished, if possible, to frighten her,—and to keep her off that little girl. If she meant to poison the first year of matrimony, John had little doubt that Eveleen could: but it struck him as a sickening proceeding on the part of a woman who had lived and thriven, all her life, on passion purely, not respect. Mr. Ingestre got so far, and then, with a courtly instinct, left the subject in his thoughts. It only occurred to him, he was sometimes glad, in spite of everything, that he had not married Eveleen.

Just after this, he reached his left arm to Violet, grasped hers gently, and asked her to tell him, very gravely, which were the “shades.” Claude seemed interested too in the point, and young Ford opposite leant forward. The jealous husband was left out, and Eveleen got him. That was only fair, thought John.

“I thought you were talking to Mother,” said Mrs. Shovell, turning. “I am so sorry I jumped. I somehow had not thought of you, Cousin John.”

He liked her awfully: her mischievous ways were sweet, between him and her father: and her musical ways were sweeter still. That was the final charm,—bound to be so, to this particular man.

“Do you play?” said Charles, surprised, when, at the inevitable moment, in resignation, his wife arose.

“A little, dear,” said Violet, stopping. “Do you like music?”

Both the elder men laughed aloud, and young Ford, really indignant, glared at Charles.

“Do you mean to say you didn’t *know*?” he exclaimed.

“On my honor,” said Charles, “I hadn’t the least idea. How should I, never having seen her at it?” he added naively.

“It’s hearing matters,” observed Ford. “I say, I suppose you have got a piano, Mrs. Shovell?”

"No," said Violet. "This is mine. Even Father had to think twice before he gave me a second as good,—and he couldn't very well give me a worse one,—and he's thinking still."

John Ingestre aroused. "Not a piano in your house?" he said. "A house without a piano, Claude? What's this?"

"It is as she says," said Claude. "This is hers, and she prefers it: so she comes here to practice, the times she can. It isn't as often as we'd like," he added gently.

"Humph!" said John, mastering the situation in all its details, marvelously. "Eveleen!"

"Well?" said Lady Ashwin, who had not entered the discussion, though it had faintly amused her, as was evident by her eyes.

"When's your silver wedding?—I forget."

"Not for ages yet," said Eveleen. "Is it, Claude?"

"Ten years," he said dryly. "I mean three."

"Three looking away from you," her cousin expounded, "and ten, at. That's what Claude means. Now, Eveleen, attend: I'll give you a piano for the occasion, and I'll anticipate the occasion by three years."

"We don't want another," said Lady Ashwin. "It looks stupid: and besides, there's barely room."

"And you give Violet's up to her," proceeded John steadily. "Do you follow the transaction?—Fully?—Quite?—Violet, my dear,"—he turned his head,—“will you come with me and choose your mother's piano to-morrow? I shall just have time before my train."

"I will," said the girl, flushing. She moved swiftly across, and it was she who thanked Mr. Ingestre for the silver-wedding present, with a kiss.

After that, having simply stated that she was out of practice, she played,—everything that her father demanded. Her father knew what he wanted, too, and Mr. Ingestre discovered a new sympathy for Claude. He was a startling fellow, always breaking out in new directions;

but this was a direction Mr. Ingestre approved: he had always approved it, in man or woman either. He adored music, and understood it. The girl was out of practice: she made several mistakes, and slurred some passages: being nervous at starting, she stopped once; but the choice, reading and manner were alike exquisite, particularly the manner.

"I feel young," said John, alluding to it. "Youth,—there's nothing like it,—it's divine." He had risen, painfully as he moved at all times, just to look at her on the piano-stool, from where he stood by the hearth. "Youth, and the world to come," he murmured, gazing intently, and speaking under cover of a quiet passage. "She will make it, she holds the key." Then he looked down at Charles, who was flushed even before the words reached him, and said, low but distinctly,—“You are a happy man.”

Eveleen Ashwin heard it all, and saw it. She had to see, she was tied. And she heard Hubert Ford sing his love-songs,—and saw how he looked at his accompanist. "My love is fresh as a lilac-bush,"—that meant youth as well,—in German, but unluckily Eveleen understood it: a heavenly, rushing, rustling clamor of spring and hope. And she saw, none could avoid seeing in the delicate candle-light, the girl-player's own expression, intent and dimly radiant,—ready. And she saw Claude's eyes, dark and weary, resting beyond her, on something she could never reach, with the look they had had once, long since, when they rested upon her. Charles she would not look at, she refused. . . . But John,—cool, critical John,—moved to tears almost, charmed,—it was hard indeed, very hard to bear,—for a mother!

It was gone from her, gone: youth was gone as well: confidence, worst of all, was shorn from her, at least for those miserable minutes while her daughter played, and all emotion stirred faster, even hers. Confidence left her,

and she hated Violet. The thing Charles had foreshadowed to Margery Brading, delayed long by laziness and idle tolerance of a serviceable thing, came that night to pass. She knew she hated, and she knew why. It is useless to state why, completely; for the Ingestre range of thought and feeling was so utterly simple,—a child could guess.

III

Violet's cousin, Margery Brading, was the first to hear, because Margery was the nearest to a sister Violet had known, and much more than a mere step-sister to Charles: and also because she conveniently came round to pass an hour that morning with Violet, since she had heard in some quarter the girl was not looking well. Margery, being a happy mother, had her own affairs—or rather affair—to talk about; and the charms, talents and oddities of the young affair known to both, for convenience in the Brading domestic circles, as “Bobbin,” would have filled up all the time at their disposal even without Violet's assistance: and she assisted sedulously.

She assisted till the last moment, when Lady Brading was flinging on her furs preparatory to departure; and then, having apparently reflected on a distant sofa for a period, she spoke:

“I *should* like to make some clothes for the sweet,” said Violet, “but really——”

Probably nobody in the world but a mother and Margery,—a mother who was Margery,—would have known by this broken sentence that she was receiving information.

“Violet, darling!” she exclaimed, with passion. “It's not true?”

Violet shrank a little, turned her eyes aside, out of the window, and remarked that what really worried her was what the relationship would be.

“First cousins, of course,” said Bobbin's mother.

"Second cousins, surely. You and I are first."

Violet flashed a glance at Margery, who saw at once that she was very shy. Indeed, if she had been enabled to think at all in advance she would have known she would be so.

"I am just going to give you one kiss," she announced from the window, "and then we will talk of something else."

"Bobbin," said Violet. "Thank you immensely, dearest. You are perfect."

"I believe what I really like best about you is the shape of your face," said Margery thoughtfully, having deposited the kiss. (We make all possible excuses for these two erratic young women. Lady Brading was a portrait painter, if that helps her case at all.)

"Mother seems to think I am getting on," responded Violet. "Sometimes I may be decent-looking, according to Mother. It is a great relief, to Charles and everybody, to know that from such an authority."

"Uncle Claude,—oh, won't he be delighted!" said Margery, taking everybody in turn, and making obvious remarks about them, which is the correct form on the occasion. Margery was "perfect," that is, mildly correct, in this company, by intuition. Margery was the Ashwin side, a great relief. Her pretty tranquil face, framed in its winter furs, was soothing equally, and Violet lay watching it intently.

"Father is coming to breakfast to-morrow," she remarked. "He never gets any breakfast at home nowadays, so he may as well. I told him so, in a note, this morning; and he will be very happy, on a post-card, to-night."

"Perhaps he will profoundly regret," said Margery. "It would have been kinder to warn him."

"On the contrary," said Violet. "In the case, far kinder to delude. I have taken the precautions to annex another doctor in advance."

"But, my dear!" protested Margery. "Won't he be hurt?"

"Desperately," said Violet, "and so relieved. Father would be quite ^{de} too nervy for anything; and I am bad enough, ^{go} ^{if} business knows. There would be a pair of us. Consequently, darling, I have circumvented Sir Claude,—and he will hate me."

"What a satisfaction," said Margery, since that was the affectionate tone.

"Isn't it? He will rather love it, though," said Violet, her harassed look softening. "He does so like it all, in his heart. I have often thought, dear, that Father would really have liked there to be another of me, only, considering my general want of attraction, Mother really couldn't see the necessity. So Father resigned himself, and concentrated. What is it, dearest?"

"You have such a way of putting things," said Margery, laughing hopelessly into the sofa cushions, for she was still kneeling at Violet's side. "You are madder than usual to-day."

"Well, really!" said Violet. "If you had sat here for an hour thinking about it, before you came! Since you came, owing to Bobbin and such things, I have been much happier." She put her delicate hand across her face. "Picture Mother, for instance, her pleasure and surprise,—she has so dreamed of being a grandmother, hasn't she?—for years. She will be ready to tear my eyes out," said Mrs. Shovell dreamily. "Father must break it to her really,—I can't."

"Darling," said Margery, getting anxious, "are you all right? You know, I don't like leaving you now, and yet I ought to go. Oh, why didn't you tell me an hour ago?" cried indignant Margery, "then we might have got something done."

"But not Bobbin," said Violet. "Yes, go to him, dear: I am better alone. . . . Tell me, Margery,—did you ever dream of spiders? Large black hairy ones,—clam-

bering about,—walking all over some lovely little saintly thing?”

“What do you mean, my dearest?” Young Lady Brading, shocked and moved, put her arms round her. “You really must not think of things like that. What can you have been doing, Violet?”

“Nothing. I am learning to do nothing,—it is the only way. It only happens after she comes in for a pleasant evening’s talk,—my mother, I mean. She doesn’t do it often, but—— She will talk of domestic matters, you understand,—Charles,—I cannot bear it. I wish she would keep away. Don’t tell anybody. I only thought you,—I only hoped,—nothing was wrong.”

Lady Brading clasped and kissed and soothed her, talking from her higher plane of happy maternity and natural good sense. She made things better too, a good deal, before she departed; but she did not like it. Turning it over, and Violet’s looks, in the carriage, she even thought seriously of diverting her course to Harley Street, and getting a few words there with her uncle Claude; only—well, there was Bobbin at home, so Margery did not.

That authority heard the next morning. He assured Violet he had breakfasted when he came, after Charles’ departure, at half-past nine; but she treated him with calm contempt.

“I know. A cup of cold coffee in the study, while you scribble lists of sickening drugs for Hubert Ford. If Mother does not dismiss that girl soon, I shall. You are breakfasting with *me*, and you sit down *there*. I am not good for much,” said Violet, with intensity, “and Charles has no letters to his name at present, but hot coffee I can arrive at, without breaking either myself, or him. It’s quite fresh, and I made it. Now, behave.”

Sir Claude behaved. “I am sorry you are not good for much,” he said politely.

She was daintily clad and finished as usual,—Violet was not a person to whom trailing draperies in the morning hours appealed; but she was pale and large-eyed, and had the little desperate look he knew. Nor did she meet his eyes, affording him at most a gray flash at intervals.

“Charles,” said Violet, folding her hands on the table, “had the most terrible toothache yesterday. It lasted just an hour by my watch. It went as suddenly as it came. We sat taking notes of the phenomenon.”

“Was that why I was asked to drop in?” asked Sir Claude.

“You dropped in to breakfast,” said Violet, surprised. “What are you talking about? Surely you filed the invitation?”

“Ah, to be sure. Yes, I filed it.” He drew his cup to him—it smelt extremely good,—and looked round the pretty table, with its new linen and old silver, with unconscious pleasure, and relief of the eye. “This is delightful,” he said vaguely. “I wish we had a little more time.”

“Are you still thinking of a consultation?” asked Violet warningly. “We have plenty of time: all the morning if I wish. Charles’ toothache was not symptomatic, it was a domestic incident, of thrilling interest to us both. We used laudanum, and thought of our latter ends. I thought of his, you know. . . . So few things happen in our house.” She leant her head on her hand.

“I am happy to hear it,” said Sir Claude. He began to let anxiety go,—he had rather a habit of anxiety,—and enjoyed himself. He found to his surprise he was hungry, having worked for two hours before Ford came; above all, the sensation of being managed pleased him. Like all persons formed and created to organize, he delighted in being himself taken in hand. Organizing anything, even breakfast, was not a thing that suited Eveleen’s genius,—in short, the circumstances in his daughter’s house were

agreeable. Presently Violet made him laugh, and just afterwards, he made her. Then, since his cup was empty, and he was examining the china absently instead of regarding her extended hand, she rose and walked round to his side.

"A little more coffee, grandpapa?" she said lightly.

"If you please," said Sir Claude,—and then sprang up like a shot.

After that, Mrs. Shovell had exactly the diversion she had promised herself, and enjoyed it to the full.

Leaving all question of coffee in the background, he followed her to the hearth, torn between his two capacities,—all his capacities, indeed: since intimate friend, and honored guest, were included; acutely eager to hear all details, terribly afraid of annoying the susceptibilities known to him from childhood, anxious above all things to be calm, considerate and correct. It was altogether a faultless performance on Sir Claude's part, and highly discreditable on Violet's. She managed to tell him nothing at all, while she talked with the greatest freedom and friendliness.

"I have such a nice doctor," said Violet. "Rather a special line, you know, ancient and deliberate. Not a hydra-headed all-round man, rather too young-looking to be safe. The sort that knows his job, and is rather bored with cases, and wears a ring round his tie. He thinks me like anybody else, I notice, and agrees with me in detesting fuss. He certainly will not take me seriously. We talk about the Housing Problem, and get on capitally."

"You—mischief!" he said hopelessly. "Pussy,—listen: just one thing, necessary——"

"No," she assured him; "it's not done. Rise to your part, I beseech you. Think, hard, what a mere father does on these occasions. He is gravely pleased, in a dressing-gown, on a hearth-rug, to hear this news."

"Well, I am not in a dressing-gown: and I am not

gravely pleased,—I am distractedly. Nor does he hear first-hand,” pursued Sir Claude, rousing. “A mere mother, I mean, hears first. Regard me as a mere mother, Violet, at least: surely that will work.” He looked beseeching.

“No, my precious, it will not: for the reason that you are not feminine. ‘Whatever my Pa is, Ma, he is not a female,’” quoted Violet from the favorite author. “Didn’t Lavinia say that? Do look up Lavinia. All the proprieties, and my nice nature, forbid me to speak to you. You have only to look to see how shy I am.” She looked delicious and wicked,—nothing else. “Take it standing up, Father dear: or rather, sitting down and drinking your coffee. It is far the best, believe me.”

She finished facing him, and earnestly. His real distress, mixed with about equal embarrassment and amusement, reached her eye. He was being teased delightfully, and she loved it; and so, in spite of everything, did he.

“Oh, I *will* tell you one little thing,” she cried, “because your face is so nice and miserable. Sit down,—on your knee, yes,—listen eloquently, now. Do you mind informing my mere Mother, at home? And if she is gravely *displeased*, on a hearth-rug, or wherever it is, not telling me? Because—I—can’t. . . . And keep her there, Father, do you mind? When the littlest thing goes wrong, these days, I am a perfect fool. . . . And promise to remain my mere father to the end,—to the *end*,” she repeated, evidently serious and anxious about it.

So, seeing no other way to compose her, he promised; and they agreed after a little nonsense to return to breakfast.

Being a society man, and a subtle scientist, Sir Claude proceeded to mislead his daughter utterly. Violet had put the incident behind her, as was evident, but he had not. He was profoundly moved by an occurrence anyone, and especially he, ought to have foreseen,—but Violet saw nothing of his emotion, and she grew calm. Calmer at

least, for he noticed several nervous tricks of her slight hands that were new to him: and he much suspected the immense breakfast she had already had, with Charles, was a fraud. So was the immense breakfast she was going to have, with Father, while Charles was discussing his at eight o'clock. These things can be managed, by simple art,—but they can also be detected.

Violet and her father talked about Honoria Addenbroke, who was to arrive that evening. Violet wondered if Father had any of those horrid little books with headings, on the subject of the Higher Branches; including some delightful things called logarithms, which had always especially attracted her. She foresaw a long and happy discussion upon logarithms, with Honoria, at dinner. Afterwards, smoking with Charles, Honoria would probably be content with the calculus.

"Coffee and calculus," said Violet, "are sure to go well together. Don't you think?"

"I am sorry to disappoint you," said Claude, on exactly the same level of absurdity, "but I fear such minute alliterative attentions will be wasted. Miss Addenbroke has long since forgotten all about the calculus; she will prove a wrangler but in name."

"Oh," said Violet, "how interesting! I forgot,—now I can get an opinion from the other shop. (That is Charles,—don't blame me.) Pray proceed: what is the true dark-blue feeling about Wranglers?"

"They are excellent and intelligent people," said the doctor, now upon his guard. "All I have known. But one does not address them on their subject in the evenings. They usually have some other simple taste,—say beetles."

"Beetles," pondered Violet, pulling at her curl. "Well, I could do that, for Honoria, as it happens. I met a beetle in here this morning, walking about the floor,—a black one. Annette screamed, and startled me. Perhaps they do not have them in her home."

Claude played with his spoon and said decidedly, "Kill it: kill them all."

"Being the first, I did not," said Violet. "I treated it as a caller,—wedding call. I just explained gently with my shoe that this was not its house and it had better go back again."

"Is that how you treat callers?" said Claude, turning his dark eyes upon her face.

"Yes." The girl laughed suddenly, and recovered uncertainly. "You don't amuse me, Father, so you needn't think it. This is no time to jest. It is a season to be serious now, for all the world. I am terribly nervous of Honoria,—terribly. Talk of beetles"—her voice shook,—“she will crush me like a worm.”

Sir Claude got up, no jesting look upon his face. "Just so," he said. "That is what I was trying to find out. I will telegraph to Miss Addenbroke at once—and she will come to me."

"No, no," said Violet, much alarmed. She caught him with her hand. "It is like you to propose it, Father dear, but it will not save me. Mother will hate her horribly, don't you see? It will make it twice as bad for me, trust my word. I want her really,—I wasn't serious,—I asked her here. Oh, good heavens!"—she stopped, furious. "Why, why are you so good always, and I quite unable to repay? It is frightful for me,—frightful! I had sooner you washed your hands of me, a little bit, sometimes. It would be so much easier,—do you mind?"

She stopped, still furious with the situation, and herself. For he was looking at her gravely, the doctor-look she most feared. He must not be anxious until this interview was over, until she had Honoria flattered, and cajoled, and chained, as it were, away from her mother's throat. Eveleen had betrayed her suspicion and fear of Lisette's sister, whose persistence in coming looked like suspicion on her side. That meeting Violet feared feverishly, above all. Both women of violent natures, under

a cool front, it might well be abominable, for witnesses. Violet had been learning her mother a little too well of late,—had almost doubted her reason, at times, she harped on one idea so strangely. Her father must not be allowed to see the unhealthy quality of her fear. She dropped her eyes, swerving from him.

"Since I am not attending to you, my dear," he said, after a pause, "will you let me send for the gentleman who is?"

"No." Violet broke suddenly into nervous sobbing. "Stay yourself,—I love you. It is not that, at all: my soul, I think. This is not your daughter,—simply a fool. Let be a moment."

He let be, watching her with the same still gravity. He knew only too well, only too surely, where the blame should lie for this. He blamed himself, now that he knew, for not keeping her mother off her,—he should have known enough of Eveleen to have thought of it. That they were withholding something from him now he could not doubt: nor whom it concerned. At moments Claude was very near the truth; but much as he loved truth, he barely wanted to reach it. Whatever Eveleen had done, it was not her fault, nor the judgment of it on him, but the effects on Violet he feared; and that was the thing that, with all his wit and wisdom, he could barely touch. He himself was the link between the two: the wife who clung to him—for it was so now—for the comforts he could give her; and the child to whom he clung, for consolation and confidence' sake. Yet he would have carried Eveleen, thus bound to him, to the furthest Pole, sooner than see this. He must feel responsible for every instant's nervous anguish in this girl whose nature was his own.

"You are torturing me, Violet," he said at last, quite simply. "Let me go. The commonest fool of a practitioner in this town could help you with a simple prescription. You are mistaken, this is not your soul. It is

folly least of all. It is the least futile thing in the world, by far. It is hardly fair to tie my hands when I can help you so easily. I have borne a good deal, these months past,—but this!" Torture was hardly too strong a word for the expression of his face.

"Just for this morning," gasped Violet, "help me then."

And "just for that morning," Claude did. He put off a personage of note for her, carelessly. Hubert Ford came round, and was sent back, rather pink in the face, with the coolest and most cutting of all Sir Claude's well-graded list of excuses. So the duke, or the duke's footman, had to wait.

IV

After lunch Claude spoke to his wife quietly, told her the fact, and that her maternal cares were not wanted.

"You must go elsewhere for conversation," he said, "or stay with me. I am not to be her doctor, she says,—so heaven knows I shall want diverting. We had best amuse one another, till she is safe."

For years now he had not spoken to her so seriously, or in such a friendly tone. He thought it just worth trying, in the case. Eveleen, staring at him, marveled what he was "after."

"A child?" she said slowly. "Violet?"

"Your grandchild. Can you face it?"

She turned away from him, and said, "Why didn't she tell me, last night?"

"What did you say to her, last night?" he asked, strenuously quiet, since his quest was for the truth.

"Oh, I don't know,—I teased her a bit. . . . She's such a little silly about Charles. Violet always was highfalutin, great feelings and so on. It's absurd to have them, about a man like that."

"You suspect him of not repaying them? Upon what ground?"

Eveleen smiled slowly, very slightly,—a look he hated and feared. He had known it appear of old, in countless cases, when she had set a snare. He kept his temper with an effort, an immense one, and went up to her.

"Eveleen," he said, "would you trust me on the subject of disease?" She just looked at him, moving an eyelid. "You are diseased with vanity, that is all. You always flatter yourself, since it has been true in a few cases, that no man can resist you. Well, let me tell you a thing to save your pains, since you regard labor-saving. It is far too late for Charles."

"Thanks," said Eveleen, and laughed. "I know it is. Claude, you are funny, really! Why should you think I meant myself? You have just told me I am going to be a grandmother." Smiling as she was, the vanity he had challenged lay in every line of her face.

"Whom else should you think of?" said he, rather low.

Lady Ashwin made a struggle, but idle mischief conquered, and she cut herself adrift. It was like her too, what she said,—a piece of magnificent audacity, tempting fate.

"Did you know they had seen Lisette, down at that place?"

He started, just visible to her eye. "Lisette? On the tour, you mean? You are dreaming."

"I am not. Ask Violet. She stayed at their hotel. She told them some lie or other, and they supposed it was all right. They knew nothing about her business, of course; but she was there."

"Well," he said, after a long pause, turned away from her. "What then?"

"Oh, I don't know. I thought I'd mention it."

Thought she would mention! That was how Eveleen worked: threw down a bait in her snare, and watched it.

"No doubt you also thought you would mention it to Violet," he said steadily, "or the next thing that came.

May I know the next thing also? Excuse," he added, "my curiosity."

"You're really anxious to know," said Eveleen. She had flashes of fearful penetration at times, among her random impulses. "Really, I forget—I said a lot to Violet last night. Well, you know John found out she stayed at the Langham here,—Lisette, I mean. I thought that nonsense,—the Langham,—though I said nothing to John. I rather hoped he was on a wild-geese chase,—it looks so stupid, limping round, where police and people have been before. Doesn't it, Claude? But he wasn't—perhaps you heard. She had been there."

"Well?" he said, still intent.

"Well,—it appears, Charles knew where she was, all that day. He didn't let on to Violet, but he had known. I suppose Lisette told him."

"And whence," said Claude, "do you get that valuable information?"

"From Violet. Ask her. She found out. . . . And she told me herself he had admired her," said Eveleen reflectively.

Claude stared at her, quite hopeless. She never failed to impress even while she shamed him. She was giving herself away, right into his hands, to glut a passing spite; if it were passing, and not a need of her nature, this vengeful jealousy of an innocent bliss.

"And did Violet do you the honor of taking you seriously?" he said, resuming the seat he had quitted facing her,—he could hardly stand. "For I cannot."

"Ah,—you are a man. . . . You think yourself so clever, Claude, and so does she. There are no such fools as clever people,—I tell you, I know it. Honoria has proved it too." She paused, looking wonderful. "Violet is quite too awfully superior," she said low. "She laughed,—you know the way. She didn't believe a word. Except just the facts, I mean; of course she knew those were true." As he did not speak at once, she added,

"There was that other girl before his marriage he went off his head for,—you remember? *She* did, I saw."

"You reminded her of that?—Ghastly!" he said beneath his breath. "Poor child, and at such a time! Of course, I see it now."

"I wouldn't, if I had known," explained Eveleen, seemingly sincere. "It was only teasing, because I can't always do with her airs. It is such—nonsense, really: to have airs about men."

On that great article of Eveleen's faith there was a pause.

"Listen," he said, coming back, for he had risen again and walked right across the room. "I am trying to treat you as a reasonable being: sometimes I think you are mad."

She laughed again, interrupting him. "It's too funny," she murmured, "you are so like her. Violet said that."

"Then I am the surer of it. . . . Listen, if you can. That boy Charles worships the ground she walks on,—as you were never worshiped in your life. You have never known what it is to be loved for your mind,—you have not asked for it. Violet is pretty and enchanting—" she winced,—“Oh yes, you know quite well she is; and he loves that as we all do, we other men, Eveleen,—he is a man like us. But her mind, which he has only recently come to realize, he adores: her thoughts, interpretations, creations,—for she can create. Did you see him while he listened to her music, the other night? I suspect you did not, since you are so—basely blind." He stopped, almost voiceless: yet it was grateful to him, a solace, to speak out all his thoughts for once. "It is only jealousy," he resumed, "and that is a disease. I bear with diseases I cannot cure, I have to: and Violet must. She is patient, heaven knows. She said nothing of your cruelty, when I held her, sick and shaken, this morning,—except that you had given her hideous dreams. . . . Well, I suppose I must tell you one more thing,

which you as a woman should not need to hear. She is creating now, these next months,—making a life. And for that, mind as well as body is necessary——”

“Oh no,” said Eveleen. “I created her.” To this disconcerting subtlety she added,—“I dare say you will say you did. You needn’t talk so finely, Claude. Of course I know all that. I’ve been through it, haven’t I? You talk too much.”

She was fighting splendidly, he could not but admit; rising to his level, carelessly, as he rose. Once more he admired, bethought himself, and turned. He had the humility that is said to be the highest quality of intellect: the quality which, at least, since it implies suppleness, wins the great intellectual battles.

“I believe I am a fool to use such arguments,” he said. “An emotional fool, doubtless,—you are right. It is simpler just to forbid you to go there. I believe, as a physician, I can do that.”

“You aren’t hers; you said so,” remarked Eveleen. “And I’m her mother. I could go to-day if I wanted to, but I don’t particularly. I dare say you are right; she had better be quiet. And I hate Honoria,” she appended.

“Ah,” he said, picking truth from its disguises. “And you have given Honoria reason to hate you, have you not?”

“Violet’s been talking,” said Eveleen, slightly recoiling, —paling as slightly.

“Are you really not aware,” he returned, approaching, “that you have told me?” She looked at him quite blankly. “Aren’t you at all aware what you have told?”

“What have I told?” she said, frightened. It was clear, at least, that she had dreaded his knowledge.

“Bah!” He snapped his fingers. “Couldn’t I argue, if I chose, from your senseless tormenting of one girl you would be capable of brutality to another? If Charles knew she was at the Langham, would not Violet have learnt of her flight? Would not both have done all they

knew? Where would they have turned? Why should I hear nothing? Why, at the very name, should that child look ill and drawn as I saw her to-day? My theory of our children," he repeated, "is not the same as yours. My theory of the man is—what I said. The girl, in all modesty, is myself. They are nobly happy together. I diagnosed it"—he looked at her oddly,—“in your presence, that first night, as something higher than health. But they are healthy”—he struck his foot down,—“and shall remain so, in spite of you. I worship health, Eveleen: it is my god, for this life. I may find a better in the next, but such as I regard it, it is a god. Well, healthy happiness, as I regard it, is progressive, not shut in itself. It gives just in proportion as it receives. I am lecturing you, and I beg your pardon, for you can know nothing of it. But the fact remains, for our present purpose, that I assume,—cheerfully assume on that ground if no other,—that they did their utmost for that poor child. And I assume, by that same reasoning, that you did not. You are unprogressive, unprofitable,—unhealthy to my mind. You had better take remedies, and soon. I warn you. I am fit to warn.”

He faced her, his whole brilliant presence challenging,—holding, as his daughter had done on a like occasion, his sword. But it was the other sword of science, the one he had sharpened by a life's devotion. Right through the rapid speech, Claude had laid the smaller weapon of his wit aside. Curiously enough, she seemed to feel the conviction more keenly for the lack of wit: it may have been another greatness in her.

“I have never seen you like this,” she murmured.

“Ah,—no, for I have never doctored you. Even when you were—as Violet, I never did. Did I? I dared not. Strange!” He stopped with a smile from which she shrank still more. “Do you wish me to doctor you, Eveleen? Have you the smallest desire for health, I wonder? That health?”

"I don't see why you are so horrid, Claude,—talking of health! I am quite well, I'm sure." Her beautiful lips quivered as he watched her. "Don't I look it?"

"Not afraid? Not of anything?" He pressed her, still smiling keenly. "No feeling—here?"

"No!" Then her lips broke their line, and suddenly laying her head in her hands, she wept. "I wish you wouldn't talk like that," she sobbed. "You oughtn't to,—to me."

"*Touché!*" he said to himself, as a fencer does; and turned, light as a fencer, on his heel to leave the room.

He had made Eveleen cry, that was something. Medically, it was a spark, a remnant of life to work on. It is very hopeless work to reason with such as she, but it is just worth reasoning; at least Claude, who was reputed to be persistently obstinate in desperate cases always, thought it was: and he had, in such cases, snatched a life or two.

But leaving her, he laughed at himself: realizing the futility of such efforts, feeling the strain of the interview recoil, and the genuine horror he had resisted, return. He had been out of himself, Eveleen was right. He knew very well he was excited, childishly excited, to-day: and he very well knew why. It was as a "mere mother" possibly; for the healers of the world may be allowed to claim something of the maternal triumph, since they share it.

V

Violet made Charles promise to say nothing of what she called the "circumstances" to Honoria. Charles did not see the point himself, since he wished to publish the glorious circumstance to all the world; but since Violet was henceforth to be humored in her smallest whim, kept under a glass shade, and there worshiped at intervals,—he promised. But her next delicately expressed desire, that he should "behave,"—that they

should comport themselves as a really ancient married couple, in Miss Addenbroke's stately presence,—made him laugh.

"Shan't," he said lightly. "You can."

"It takes two to do it," reasoned Violet. "No, don't be foolish. Listen, I will try to explain. You ought to see without explanation. But for—Lisette, Honoria might herself have been married now. Well—you understand?"

"No," said Charles, in his cheerfully disobliging manner,—as though the word had been "yes."

He was "tiresome" evidently, and Violet sighed. She was so anxious to have things nice for Honoria: and Charles could be nice, when he chose. She said no more for the time. Presently he came to her repentant, said he had been thinking it over, and he saw the point. He would treat the lady as a new-made widow, with care. By his subsequent remarks, Violet much feared he was still thinking of Lisette's wicked caricature of Honoria's suitor in the train; but the general result was better than nothing, so she let him be, trusting that Honoria's awe-inspiring personality would do the rest.

So, for a time, it did. Miss Addenbroke was tall and broad, and deep of voice, and that goes for something. Charles showed himself, as his wife had expected, a capital host, and both he and the household rose in style to the advent of the first visitor. No other had yet slept beneath their roof, and the guest's room on the highest floor was but lately finished. Violet, seeming more fragile than usual beside her burly cousin, escorted Honoria to her room, and made excuses for such finishing touches as were lacking to it.

"When shall I see Cousin Eveleen?" said Honoria, taking off her gloves, having glanced once round without remark.

"Oh, I hope soon," said Violet.

Honoria's manner was condescending, as though she

spoke to a schoolgirl who was merely acting proxy for her natural hostess. She thought little of her quarters, evidently, and Violet felt small. She knew well she had never been loved by Honoria, who, though she admitted no rivalry with such a paltry, home-bred product as the "Ashwin child" seven or eight years her junior, had been somewhat pricked, nevertheless, by her readiness and wit, when she first stayed in her father's house. Honoria had classed her on that occasion as a conceited little girl, and still preserved the attitude.

"Would you like to rest?" said Violet. "Dinner is at eight."

The question seemed to be an offense. She had asked it, since it was public property that Honoria had been enjoying a "breakdown" in health for several months: indeed, ever since her sister's disappearance. It is true, there are many possible interpretations of a "breakdown,"—more every year; still, so far as it went, it had been regarded as creditable by the Ingestres. However, whatever may be the full philosophy of breakdowns, Honoria had evidently morally conquered hers; and her remarks on the subject made her cousin, who had remained tired since the morning, feel smaller yet.

Honoria Addenbroke was not a pleasant person: of some characters, after all, it had better be confessed. Innumerable people had tried to like her, and failed. She had all the Ingestre faults, with none of their virtues—and they had very striking virtues, as we have striven to show; all their assumption, with none of their charm; and some added roughness that was probably an Addenbroke heritage. She could hardly speak without trampling, deliberately, on people's corns. Her claims to intellect consisted almost exclusively of that singular mathematical bent, which is a special genius, like the musical,—like music, approaches to mania sometimes,—and like music, seems to be independent of either character, or of real dignity or agility of thought. She had

no delicacy, and gloried in it: not like her little sister, from idle mischief, but from a genuine love of seeing her fellow-creatures wince, which implies self-indulgence, and inclines to cruelty at the worst. Last, she had the extra hardness which lifelong unpopularity imparts,—since it is too true that from him who has not, is taken, in life,—and owned no real friends, unless one counted a few hunting-men, who admired her “form.” Naturally, she had consorted with them largely, which fact had not improved her drawing-room style. She despised drawing-rooms,—as Mrs. Shovell learnt to her cost,—extolled “nature,” and “natural methods,” and her age was twenty-nine. It is really quite unnecessary to refine further on the character of the lady whose “muzzling,” under peculiarly difficult circumstances, Violet had undertaken.

All the same, Violet was convinced she would, sooner or later, have been able to manage Honoria,—had it not been for Charles. She dressed for dinner in black, out of consideration for her guest: her afternoon robe of black velvet, since Violet did not wear what she called “cold black” very willingly. The “warm black” of velvet suited her clear complexion and dark hair particularly well, though she had a strong idea the less becoming choice would have been more sympathetic towards Honoria. She argued this delicate point with Charles while she was dressing: and Charles, who looked his own best in “cold black,” but disliked it profoundly for her, considered that he scored. He had very strong and rather singular ideas about Violet’s clothes, and she occasionally deferred to them experimentally. However, to-night his frivolous and heartless suggestion that she should wear her wedding-dress showed that his opinion was not for the moment worth regarding, and should have prepared her for what was to come. Yet, where a girl like Honoria is concerned, one cannot possibly be prepared for everything.

Honoriam had arrived at the house in black; but that proved by subsequent events to be misleading. She appeared at dinner in emerald green, flashing with iridescent trimmings, cut very low. She really looked well in a certain style, for, like all Ingestre offshoots, she was well-built, with a beautiful skin. But she startled Annette, Violet's small Swiss maid, almost into dropping the sauce; and she clashed with Dr. Ashwin's benevolent scheme of color in the dining-room so painfully that Charles feared indigestion might eventuate,—to others, fortunately, not Honoriam,—all the same.

For a time he tried not to look at her, and looked at Violet. Then having, as we have said, conducted himself as an able host, with most elegant propriety, for half the meal, the full possibilities of Honoriam seemed to break upon his consciousness as by a light from heaven. She was vain, it dawned upon Charles, without being attractive: an opportunity almost irresistible to a man of parts, and personal advantages as well. He resisted virtuously for a time, being reminded by Violet's pale and pensive appearance that abstract "behavior" was desirable; but she refused to catch his eye even after his best answers to the Wrangler, which piqued him; so, just about the cheese course, he abandoned the effort, and began to look instead, far too engagingly, in the direction of the lady-guest.

Honoriam, at the time, was telling him about Cambridge: and it struck Charles, in a new flash of enlightenment, that she thought he was an Oxford man. If Honoriam did think so, she shortly became convinced of it, because Charles was intensely curious to learn all about Cambridge manners from Miss Addenbroke. They were such remarkable manners, it appeared, in many ways, that he rather wondered what the Newnham authorities had been about, in Honoriam's time: he was only thankful that time was past; for Charles liked the modern college girl, and had known a number of her, intimately.

Violet, on the noble understanding as to nonsense which they shared, which they had practiced almost from the first meeting, and which was one of the foundation-stones of their love and confidence, did not give him away, though she took every other liberty their mutual convention allowed her of snubbing him, dodging him, and diverting his victim's attention. She failed miserably. Honoria flatly ignored her: her rather protruding eyes were fixed on Charles, and that gentleman, summoning all his graces to his aid, made a dead set at her, and before the close of the meal conquered her completely. Memories, no doubt, of Lisette's graceless skit upon the other man came to Mr. Shovell's assistance. He could not but think, if he gave his serious mind to it, he could cut out that bandy-legged bounder somehow; though he hardly hoped for such prompt conquest as was actually his.

Violet was in despair: for every minute, as his absurdities increased, she thought Honoria must see through him, and the fury she dreaded break upon them both. She cut the dessert-period short, by Miss Addenbroke's reckoning, much too soon, rising before the guest had drained her wine. While she paused to let Honoria pass in front of her, Charles, who was holding the door for them, paid simultaneously a flagrant compliment to Honoria's dinner-gown, and pinched Violet's neck. But she was really too displeased to look at him. His behavior was most unfeeling, considering Honoria's situation, and his real inability to console her. If Charles had been able to console Honoria, it would, of course, have been different. If Violet had known she was open to consolation she would naturally have asked another man. As the circumstances stood, she held her velvet skirts with care from Charles, and passed in abstraction in Honoria's ample wake.

"What a delightful boy Charles is," said Honoria, lying down upon the sofa, which had been conveniently

placed sidelong to the fire, that same morning, by Sir Claude Ashwin, for his daughter's benefit. It seemed Honoria felt more friendly to her late breakdown after dinner than before,—she had, like Lisette, a fine appetite,—for she proceeded to close her eyes against the lamplight with a pained expression.

Violet, seeing no possible answer to the remark,—unless to thank her for not saying Charlie,—made none. She moved the lamp away from Honoria's eyes, and sitting down near it, prepared to make the coffee, a duty she kept in her own hands, since she had done so at home. Charles was by no means as particular as his father-in-law, but that made no difference to an Ashwin, granted the ideal once rooted in her mind. So she made ideal coffee daily, and the occasional guest approved. She lit the little copper lamp, and while it boiled, purring gently, took up the minute piece of needlework she had laid aside on Honoria's arrival. Her back was half-turned, and a mere look at Honoria's hands had sufficed to show Violet she was not a needlewoman, and unlikely to be curious,—so all was safe.

Honoria, as the silence grew marked, opened her eyes and took a very keen survey of as much of her cousin as she could see round the corner. She could only perceive her swathed dark hair, the nape of a very pretty neck,—unadorned, since even the pearls were discarded to-night,—and the occasional glimpse of an active hand. Violet had not, at dinner, appeared happy to Honoria: rather mopy for a new-made wife. She had shown no sign of courting her husband; far from it,—she had flown at him more than once; and her peaceful manipulation of fine white materials just out of sight from the sofa, was probably feigned.

"You look sweetly domestic," said Honoria. "Would it be too awful to smoke?"

"Please," said Violet. "We always do. Only won't you wait for coffee first?"

"Oh, I never take it till later," said Honoria. "Old college trick—Aunt has learnt my ways. I burn the midnight oil, you know."

Mrs. Shovell blew out her little copper lamp at once, and recurred to her sewing. "You have been able to get on with your book, then?" she queried. "I am so glad." Honoria had been writing a book about something quite beyond everybody, for years. Connections inquired after it at intervals, fearfully.

"Don't you take coffee?" said Honoria: who did not intend to discuss her book with a "kid." The girl shook her head.

"I must live on the savors at present, Father says. Charles will clamor for some presently, though. Perhaps you will have a cup with him."

Honoria, elaborately smoking, did not reply, or thank her. That may also have been a college trick, of course. "I suppose," she said pleasantly, "you have been dosed and dieted all your life, haven't you, Violet? You look it."

"Do I? In what way?"

"Washed out and jumpy. What Felicia called a dying-duckish expression."

Violet blushed deeply, not at the personality, and her hands dropped suddenly in her lap. Miss Addenbroke, still spying at her, saw it and laughed.

"You think me heartless, don't you, my dear," she said. "And soulless too, I shouldn't wonder. But personally, I should warn you, I have no religion. I can't pray over Felicia, like Aunt. It's foreign to my nature. I prefer to face the facts, and to regard it as the fate of personality. Everyone to the life that suits them, is what I say,—not to Aunt, of course, she can't stand it. I own Felicia, though a fool, was a perfectly consistent one. I saw that clearly as soon as I came to think it out. Her ideal was always a bit divergent from mine, that's all. It needed testing a little by intellectual standards,—which she

hadn't got. But she did the best she knew," added Honoria, weightily pondering.

"You talk as though she did not suffer," said Violet.

"She would not suffer long," said Honoria calmly. "I know it sounds bad, to finicky people,—but I happened to know Felicia. I thought the whole thing out during that awful period of mental strain I had. One must be philosophical about such things: no other course is open. Felicia *could* not suffer long."

"You mean she would die?" said Violet.

"No, I don't, my dear little bit of sentiment. That is a very old-world view."

"As old as Goldsmith, I know. If yours is the newest, I prefer his."

"Don't interrupt me," said Honoria. "Felicia had not the moral force, nor the mental, to suffer really. She did not know what suffering was. She simply followed her instincts, worked out her nature, fulfilled herself, in short. That is right, by the modern standards. Her life with us was the unnatural one, I mean. She is probably, at this minute, far less miserable than sentimentalists like Aunt are in her interest,—and not ashamed at all. . . . There are moments when I envy her," said Miss Addenbroke: and Violet, by a tell-tale drop in her tone, suspected it was true.

"And her letters—her letter to you?" she said.

"Oh, that,——" the lecturer had just winced in the pause,—“written in a fury, at red-heat. Her temper was vile, of course. Only I, probably, knew what it could be. When she lost it, she cursed like a bargee,—give you my word. She wasn't quite as pretty as she looked, Felicia. . . . Not to mention she had no idea of wording things," the author added contemptuously. "She wrote like a baby. You could never go by her letters, what she thought."

"I am sorry," said Violet, just as she would have spoken again,—“I must ask you to hold your tongue."

"What's that?" rapped Honoria. "Talking down to me?"

"It's simply I am not—able to bear it. I dare say it is all very true,—and beautifully modern. . . . Will your book be published soon?"

Whereat Miss Addenbroke, rising a little, by the aid of her elbows, on the sofa, said what she thought of Violet, her mother and Lisette.

When Charles came in, Honoria, in a luxurious attitude, with cigarette ashes freely strewn about, was lounging with a book. She looked somehow as though she had had a field-day; which was the fact. Violet had brought the light back to her, and was seated herself in her old position, without the lamp's illuminated ring. Charles exchanged a few bright nothings with the guest, and made her laugh rather loudly; and then, since Violet did not turn, nor move to serve him, though the coffee boiled, he walked up to her, still chaffing Honoria, and from behind, laid his hands to either side her face.

"Might a fellow have some coffee, missus?" he requested. "It smells so nice." Violet served him mechanically, passing the cups in turn across her shoulder, without changing her position otherwise.

"Two?" queried Charles. "Hasn't Miss Addenbroke been regaled?"

"I'll take it later on, thanks," said that lady calmly.

"Then I must drink 'em both," remarked Charles, of the two little cups. "She's been cut off by her Pa."

He stood, holding both cups, on the hearth for a minute, admired by Honoria, as was evident. Charles had no objection at all to being admired, though the Wrangler seemed an ungainly object to his passing glance. He stood, as though for his portrait, before her. Then, looking beyond, he saw Violet move her hand, saw it clench on the tray beside her, and her head sink. He put the cups down hastily.

"My blessing, what is it?" He was behind her, using a voice Honoria had not heard. "Cold hands?" His warm one was over it. "Faint, are you?" He was kneeling beside her. "Tell me—did I vex you at dinner? I was only fooling—she understands." She was in his arms completely, her dark head close to his,—but languid utterly: she did not move. Honoria stared, her cigarette suspended, and its ashes dropping on the couch.

"She won't speak," said Charles, after a pause. "What happened? What did you say to her?" He flashed blue lightning round the corner at the guest. "Oh, I'll have no more to do with your horrible family," he muttered, rising. "You'll kill her among you,—won't be satisfied till you do. Get up!"

Honoria the Wrangler rose hastily. He threw the cushions she had crushed into place with a practiced hand, careless temper in every gesture. He was really more than ever attractive to the eye, though he was not thinking of it now.

"Don't touch her," he said fiercely, turning. "Keep off! Do you hear? You've done enough for one evening."

"I've done nothing, I can tell you," said Honoria. "She's been bred too soft."

"Well, it's something to have been bred at all," muttered Charles. The remark hardly reached Honoria, but Violet stirred.

"Don't," she murmured, as he reached her. "She'll—do it again."

"She won't,—she'll get no chance. Come along." He practically lifted her with his arm.

"I'll go up, it's best," the girl said, wincing visibly from the fuller light. "Head aching rather,—I am sorry, Honoria. Please go back, he should not have disturbed you,—if I had thought."

"I couldn't stop her," she explained wearily to Charles

upstairs. "She has been saving it up for months, probably. I said a thing that annoyed her, rashly, so she let loose before the time. Not having Mother, she talked to me. I doubt if before she had thought I was—worthy of it."

"Didn't you talk, Violet?"

"I couldn't, somehow, to-night. I only thought things, eloquently. I interrupted her about twice, I think. She said I had not been sufficiently slapped in the nursery, or I should know how to speak to my elders. Something like that. She had offered to do the same kind office by Lisette too, I gathered, before she left. It is the schoolmistress in her, above all," said Violet, gathering force, "I can't bear, because I respect the profession. If she had taught me, I certainly should have made faces at her, all the time. Lisette probably did—sweet faces. . . . Oh, Lisette shines in comparison, Charles,—a star, a flower. It was—it is—an infinitely sweeter nature, healthier too. Not simpler, because Honoria is simple; she only learnt too much at college,—much too much. Mother is refined compared with Honoria, for Mother is vulgar only when she wants to be. Mother is a queen, born and trained to ruling. Her manner quite often excuses the things she says. Honoria rules by violence,—it is the scullion-nature,—no, no, scullions clean things,"—she put her hand to her head,—“the scavenger's. I believe they clean things too, and if so I beg their pardons. I have lost all my words to-night.”

She rested against him for some minutes silently, one delicate hand still to her brow, the other in his possession.

"Will you sleep, love?" said Charles.

"Oh yes, I think so: presently. You must go down,—master of the house, you know. Make my apologies—with the necessary negligence. One of my headaches will do. I was always so proud of not having the thing, but I let myself in, didn't I?" She put her arms suddenly round his neck. "Be nice to her, dear. She has suffered

really,—you can tell. She must have been through a terrible time, and that embitters people. Will you?"

"It's not necessary to kiss me, you know," said Charles, "for me to do all you want."

"I won't then," she laughed. "I hate waste in a house." But he had felt her soft lips all the same.

"I didn't know this was a doll's house," said Honoria, in a marvelously unpleasant tone. She was again on the sofa, of course, though in a slightly better attitude.

Charles, who read his classics, got all the way. "I must make her excuses, Miss Addenbroke," he said, his back turned to her, and his hands clenching the chimney-shelf. "She is not extra well just now, and Sir Claude has warned us to be careful. Perhaps she did not tell you; he was here all the morning."

"Oh, do you know," said Honoria in confidence, "I shouldn't pay too much attention to that. He always spoiled her,—an only lamb, you know. I noticed how she was coddled that time I stayed in the house. If Violet was left alone a bit, she would probably get all right."

Charles could not resist. "She will get all right after next May, the doctor gives us reason to hope," he dryly observed.

"May?" Honoria gaped for some instants. "Oh,—what a way to tell me," she said, rather offended.

"I was forbidden to tell you at all. I respect the letter of the law, that's all."

"Oh," said Honoria. "Forbidden, were you? Why didn't she want me to know?"

"I suppose because she imagined it might pain you. That is her reason, usually."

"What fussy futility," said Honoria, reddening. She added—"And how characteristic."

"Isn't it?" said Charles heartily. Violet had told him to be polite, so he was, whenever Honoria gave him the opportunity. He turned round soon, looking charming, a thing he could do with ease.

"Is it time for your coffee now?" he asked, alluding

to it like a prescribed draught on purpose. "I think I can tackle that machine. 'If I make a mess of it, don't be too hard on me."

"You could heat up the cold," remarked Honoria, watching his proceedings at the coffee-tray. "That would earn the wife's approval best."

Charles just refrained from throwing a cup at her, because the little cups were valuable. No other reason deterred him.

"On the contrary," he said blithely. "I'm a bit of an economist, but I shouldn't venture to do that." He had set the thing alight again, quite cleverly, Honoria noticed. Personally, she was one of the hopelessly awkward women, who barely know how to hold a thing, still less to handle it.

"I've burnt a hole in your sofa-cover, I'm afraid," she observed after a period, looking at her cigarette. "Don't tell on me."

"All right," said Charles satirically.

"Is she squeamish about things?"

"Violet? My dear Miss Addenbroke, it's not the word." Nor was it,—being a word Charles loathed.

"Do you let her sit on you?" said Honoria, getting happier.

"Yes: and the sofa, when she will," said Charles, "and can. Ah—I hope that's all right, not too strong." He brought the cup to her side.

"Thanks," said Honoria, since she could hardly avoid it. "I shouldn't have said, on sight, that you were hen-pecked," she added, looking at his nonchalant bearing with a smile. Charles, thinking how he hated prominent eyes, sat down before the fire thoughtfully.

"I have not had time to show the marks," he said. "Haven't been married long enough, you know. She's only given me a general idea of the sort of thing,—to be filled out in our subsequent numbers. Rather like the first lecture of the October term. You feel vaguely oppressed after a first lecture, if I remember right,—solemn,

—bored in advance,—ready to take any fun that comes to forget it.” Nothing, not even Violet’s exhaustion, could excuse the glance Charles cast at Honoria. Charles was an actor, unfortunately, and was getting interested in his part. He drank a cup of cold coffee cheerfully, remarked that it was quite decent, and that he would have another of the same sort. He had an objection to waste in a house, caught from Violet: and besides, the coffee, though cold, was of her making.

Honoria, meanwhile, flattered herself she was hearing the confidences of an over-married man. His scene with the girl, when she came to reflect, had been rather over-acted. His manner now, to her eyes and ears, rang true. Possibly because she wished it so much to be so.

“You are a ridiculous boy,” she said kindly. The last century would have said a “naughty man.”

“It’s such a blessing to be in uncritical company,” said Charles, leaning back. “You can say what you like. The Ashwin level is pretty lofty, don’t you know. You have to watch your words.”

She laughed, gratified. “But I’m far from uncritical, I ought to tell you,” she remarked.

“Oh—don’t say you are a word-watcher too!” He over-did his surprise, with care. “Then I must buck up,” he added languidly. “How beastly!”

Charles modeled himself, in thought, upon some of the people Honoria had probably known at Cambridge, whom he remembered vaguely. He had before now taken them off. It was true, he had been down for some years,—but she had been down longer still. He had an idea that the type always persisted, and that he could still do it if he tried. Considering some of the things he was urged on, by Honoria’s capital replies, to say, he was really rather glad his wife was not there.

Having toned and fixed this ancient pose, he colored it by degrees with what he thought might be an Oxford manner, rather decadent. Then, recollecting Studley at his honeymoon hotel, he tried a little of that, mixed in.

The result was really immense: and Honoria, so-called clever, swallowed it whole.

"I was as polite as they make 'em!" he said later, with the most unholy glee, to Violet, whom he discovered still awake. "It's the stable, really, not the scullery. She's the hard-riding variety of Wrangler, ours. My aunt, what a brute she is!" He walked about the room. "She's frightfully gone on me, darling. I shall go on till she's on the edge of leaving, and then let her have it, hot and strong, on the steps. I shall,—you shut your little head! I shall do it. She burnt a hole in the new covers,—blast her!"

"Charles—dear!"

"Well, I did think at least the type knew how to smoke! Can't you give her a lesson to-morrow? She was all over ashes,—beastly. A black hole,—right in the middle!"

Charles came back to that. He had a particular affection for Violet's chintzes, they were so exactly like herself. "And I couldn't let her know," he finished, coming to a stand with passionate accusation, "owing to *you*!"

He was more violently excited than she had often seen him. She heard him out without much comment, still less did she attempt reproof. He had evidently borne a good deal, in her service, for all the relief of comedy by the way; and Honoria, clinging to her college habits, had not released him till very late. He looked worn now, for all the laughter she had heard below; and he had watched a black hole for three hours and more, and said nothing about it.

"I will say a spark from the fire did it," Violet observed for his consolation. "Father pushed the couch too close. A wood spark is respectable, isn't it?—nice and clean."

But Charles could not forget or forgive that hole, for weeks. He said something improper every time he caught sight of it. The result was that Violet had to lie upon the sofa more than her custom was to conceal it: even when she assured everybody she felt quite well again.

II

THE TALISMAN

I

MRS. SHOVELL, as a lightning-conductor, fulfilled her office with marked success. She had received already from either contending party the worst of the vituperation, and, as she had trusted, her father's household was spared the storm. Honoria and her Cousin Eveleen, during their private interview the following day, were terribly and tranquilly frank with one another, as was to be expected, but the worst Violet had anticipated did not occur. They even found one subject of sympathy, which may possibly be divined.

Meteorological conditions in the interview, to pursue the image, were moderating, and, needless to add with Ingestres, were masculine. Eveleen, owing to Claude, whose singular behavior she had not yet fathomed, and who had succeeded yet once more—he was always doing it—in catching her attention amid the crowds of men jostling in her path, was more passive than her custom. Honoria, owing to Charles Shovell's agreeable trifling at breakfast, where they had again been *tête-à-tête*, was almost sunny. And, by a happy miracle, as soon as she and her cousin chanced upon this latter most interesting question,—they agreed.

Yet we must do the pair of ladies justice: rather, we must do Lady Ashwin justice, for, as her daughter declared, she was by far the more important and interesting personality of the two. When Honoria, smiling, told Eveleen that the Shovell boy was a flirt, implying carefully that he was more, Eveleen's attitude in accepting the suggestion was much the more respectable and sincere. Eveleen really did doubt Charles: she thought she had good reason for doing so, and Claude's fine phrases had

had time to affect her fundamental conviction but little. It took time and repetition, in Eveleen's case, to affect such convictions; also, such gifts of penetration as she possessed all helped her incredulity. Charles had lost his head once before his marriage, and if he were "that kind," might lose it again. The reports she had put together concerning Lisette, the arch allusions of Honoria, all fell into her conception of the case, and fell before it had had time to be shaken seriously. It was a comfort not to have to disturb her conviction, anyhow: because when Eveleen did evolve and adopt an idea, all of her own, she liked to dwell on it at intervals, unvexed by doubts.

By the time Honoria had left her, she had few doubts left,—few, that is, as to Charles' being "that sort." She did not for an instant credit that he was serious in admiring Honoria. Eveleen was a woman of sense, and, granted Charles had admired Lisette, it was impossible that he could admire Honoria, even idly. He just played with any girl that came, and it was likely to be hard on Violet, but , was probably Violet's fault for talking too much.

This, we may point out, was precisely the attitude of her original letter to her daughter, the one that had so infuriated Charles: which only proves once more Lady Ashwin's remarkable tenacity of the few ideas she had. Eveleen, though she was occasionally amused by something Violet said,—perhaps a spark of Ingestre cropping out,—had long been certain that, especially in excitement, she said a number of unnecessary things. She was very careful to do the contrary when Charles, as not infrequently, came in of a Sunday evening to talk to her in her own charming little room. He was really a very nice boy: bright, entertaining and ordinary, and Eveleen liked him. She just showed her sympathy with him, on the subject of Violet, now and then. She had suffered from Ashwin chatter herself, for twenty-three years now, very nearly, so she knew. And Charles, who liked Lady Ashwin in the life considerably better than in her letters,

gave her no reason whatever to doubt that he was perfectly content with her own style of conversation.

Honorias attitude was infinitely less agreeable and excusable, and it is probably waste of time and pains even to touch upon it. Her uncle, John Ingestre, in publishing abroad his hint to Violet that she had "lost her man," and in adding a little more to it in the same style, would have simplified a biographer's labors immensely. We prefer to put it in Violet's manner: that Honorias had been through a "terrible time" of disappointment and sullen self-reproach, and that she was wretched enough to seize any consolation to her defrauded affections. The fact that she had determined to dislike Violet, to dislike her powerfully, to the extent of threatening physical violence, for the few keen things she had said across her shoulder from beside the coffee-tray the night before, assisted her attitude hugely. She seized the first method of stinging that came to avenge her outraged dignity.

Nor did Charles fulfil his threat of disilluioning Honorias "hot and strong" upon the doorstep at her departure, since Violet was down by that time, grasping the social reins with her accustomed skill. He only stood upon his threshold, markedly tamed and tractable, with Violet's hand through his arm, and let her do the talking, while he gazed absently over Miss Addenbroke's shoulder, his eyes just missing her face. Nothing in the world can look so vague as really blue eyes when they choose; and if Charles' were a little remorseful too, Honorias own protuberant pair did not perceive it. She thought him charming, if abstracted, to the last.

"Thank goodness," said Violet, with heartfelt relief, when she was gone. "I think now Cousin John may do his worst, in that quarter. I shall suggest as much to Cousin Agatha, when I write to-day."

Violet was writing to refuse, with regret, a most courteous invitation from Mrs. Ingestre, the owner of the poisoned lap-dog in our first chapter, the mistress of

Ingestre Hall. The girl did not feel fit for such festivity herself, either in health or spirits; but she had suggested to Charles that he might go, and have some dancing and skating. Charles' manner of replying showed that he was tempted, for the Hall at Christmas was delightful, stocked with appropriate festivities and pretty girls. Violet described it all to him, in most attractive detail, for she had visited there as a child; but at the end of all he replied, in a pretty formula that she never forgot, that he liked a little house best in bad weather, and he stayed at her side.

Violet, in bad or at least uncertain weather, was only too happy to have him, for she needed sorely to divert her thoughts. She was haunted perpetually, as no girl should be at such time, by the phantom of Lisette,—the tortured phantom of those desperate letters; and equally by the phantom in her father's house, the skeleton behind his doors. She grew to dread even a casual meeting with her mother, who showed an aptitude for playing with certain subjects that was exactly in proportion with her perception of the girl's shrinking from them. In the interval after such an ordeal, Violet's saner judgment persuaded her of a mental twist that must account for it; and she teased herself wondering if her father recognized the condition also, and how much of her own suffering from it it was right or loyal to betray. It was wrong to brood, anyhow, she knew: yet she could not avoid it, at least when she was alone.

But with Charles to fall back on, it was different. She told him little or nothing of her vexations, but he was always there for her to look at, healthy and handsome and serene. He had innumerable friends, and it was "kind" of him, Violet considered, to stay with her as much as he did. Violet repaid kindness with kindness in the walks of daily life, and she spent herself upon his entertainment,—though it was not the least necessary. Charles had long thought her one of the most amusing

people of his acquaintance, and he did not change such opinions easily.

"Cousin Agatha" at the Hall did not reply again to the little note of explanation she received about the Christmas visit, tossing it to John in silence, and noting his grunt, half of regret and half of approval, when he had twice read through the words. But when the family Ingestre came up for their short season in town in March, she proceeded with remarkable promptitude to call upon the pair. John's description of them had interested her; and though she disliked Eveleen Ashwin for several reasons, some very remote, she saw no immediate reason to dislike Eveleen's daughter. She was indeed very kind to the daughter: brought her masses of hot-house flowers, even primroses from the country since she preferred them, talked to her about indifferent things, while she closely watched her face, and took her several drives, according as she could stand it, in London or beyond.

"There's Eveleen with two carriages," she remarked to John, "heaps of time on her hands, of course, and never takes her out. The girl must have quarreled with her, John,—it's nonsense. It's hardly decent, otherwise."

"Indecent if you like," said Mr. Ingestre, "it's not the case. They are still on terms, owing to the men. Dear Eveleen has done all she knows, I haven't a doubt, to make the girl dislike her as much as she dislikes the girl. But Eveleen likes Shovell, and Ashwin likes his daughter,—more than a little,—and there they stand."

"Well, I call it disgraceful," said Agatha, who had been moved. "You should have seen her little pathetic face, when I proposed it. Can't rise to a carriage at present—naturally: nervous of hired ones,—goodness knows. Nothing to call a garden, some way from the Park,—loves the air. The air! You'd have said that was a cheap enough commodity, even for that selfish woman to offer; but she won't."

"How does the boy strike you?" said the head of the

family, who took his consort's opinion occasionally. Being a downright lady, she invariably had one, though Mr. Ingestre stamped it underfoot now and again, just to show her her position. On her opinion of Eveleen, John did not think it worth while to stamp: knowing all about it for twenty years back.

"The boy's devoted at present," she said shortly. "Can't say if it will last. He looks as if he could be a rogue, on occasion."

"Somebody—won't suggest who—is putting it about London that he is."

"Contradict it then,—it's nonsense! Contradict it, John, do you hear? It's not tolerable that girl should be teased, more than she must be in any case. If anyone can hold a man of that sort, I back a girl like that, once give her a fair chance. It's absurd to decry intellect in such a case. If someone would murder the mother—heaps of men must be longing to do it,—her chance would be better, naturally."

John merely raised an eyebrow and scratched his jaw. Intellect was not a word he ever granted to women, though he had known some clever ones. Claude's daughter was cleverish, and John personally enjoyed her company; but he would not have given a penny for her chances, with one of Charles' name, had they depended on her wits alone. John had taken the trouble to look up the Shovells, after he left his cousin's house; and he had come to the conclusion—oddly matching Eveleen's, though entirely independent,—that Claude had been hasty in the alliance. Not that it mattered, fortunately, to John: it was off the direct line; he only drew Agatha and others about Claude's little girl, persistently, at every opportunity. He did so now.

"I touched the subject of Felicia, foolishly," said Agatha. "I hadn't meant to. I tried to move from it again, but she wouldn't let me off. She stood with her back turned, and talked to me. Her feeling's exagger-

ated, of course,—silly little thing,—but she showed me it all, in words. *In words*, John: I did not see her face while she spoke at all, and the tone's like the father's, soft and slight. I should have thought," said Mrs. Ingestre reflectively, "of all the women I know, only the Duse could make me cry, turning her back. The girl could have made that sort of actress, granted a better presence and a bigger voice."

"I disagree about the presence," said John. "She has it, when she likes. So has Ashwin, on occasion, for all his restlessness. I must—really—sometime—go into the origins of that stock."

This short conversation was significant of the stride made by the Ashwins that season in the Ingestre estimation. They had become suddenly more interesting, fascinating almost, to the other "lot." Claude, ridiculously busy always, only caught society's attention by flashes, in odd times. Everyone admitted he was worth having, if you could get him, that was all. But that was a good foundation; and Violet promised to build upon it rapidly. Violet happened to hover just at the verge of several "*mondes*," and they all accepted her; the smart, the intellectual, the artistic, the old true-blue to which the Ingestres belonged, even the useful people, who cannot be ignored nowadays,—all were allowed at least a shot for Mrs. Shovell, and put Mr. Shovell in their pockets by the way. That Charles was naturally sociable, and Violet naturally shy, is all their biographer really means by this expression.

Before what Agatha Ingestre called her "chance" vanished that season, she was seen and admired a good deal; though the majority of the visitors to her pretty little house in the far-west, unlike Agatha in the carriage, came more for their own sake than hers. She had innumerable new friends, and various well-established old ones; and among the old, when she least expected him, faithful to his word, came Jones.

II

He surprised Violet very much when she found him sitting in her drawing-room one Sunday afternoon in the early winter,—just before the coming of that New Year which now enshrined her highest hopes. Among the many un-English tricks of Violet's little maid, from which her mistress had to wean her by slow degrees, was that of overlooking, when she admitted a visitor with the most anxious friendliness and a fascinating smile, the little matter of the name. In this case she told Madame that the gentleman had "*bons yeux*" and resembled a "*pasteur*" in his responses. (The gentleman should not, of course, have had anything to respond to, but Annette's taste for conversing with the more sympathetic guests was past praying over, according to Violet.) The result was that Mrs. Shovell very nearly refused him: which would have been a matter of lasting regret to both.

As it was, she swept into the drawing-room with her finest air, prepared to be bored by a new curate,—stood a minute with her brows up in a manner he remembered,—and then skimmed in an impetuous flight to his side, and gave him the welcome, sweet and emphatic, of which he had dreamed.

He brought no news, he hastened to warn her lest she should be disappointed; but her radiant look of welcome did not change. It seemed she really wanted to see him, not merely his quarterly report on Miss Lisette's affair. Asked whence he came, Marmaduke confessed he came from home, where he had been resting quietly for several weeks. But it emerged by degrees that he had been to Paris more than once, and once to Belgium, on a false scent. His secretaryship Jones had abandoned meanwhile, having found a "fellow he knew" (probably called Brown) to conduct his "show." This probable Brown helped his researches by keeping his eyes and ears alert

for news in London, while Jones made raids, at intervals, upon the foreign centers. All kinds of "fellows," terriers of his own breed, were helping Jones in the more likely spots, and one or two women in Paris, of whom he spoke with deep respect. He did not yet despair, Violet gathered, and always for the same reason: because of Miss Lisette's loveliness,—he harped on that. The thing that was a lure to others was to Jones' simple mind a light,—a light unquenchable,—that might ultimately lead him to her hiding-place. It was certainly a defensible point of view, but it struck Violet as peculiar in the man who held it: and it was one of the oddities in their conversation which she stored for Charles.

The purposes of Jones' call came to light by degrees,—he had no idea of paying calls without a practical purpose, and would have been mildly surprised to hear that anybody ever did so. First, he had brought Mrs. Shovell a Christmas offering, which he produced in the most shamefaced manner from an inner pocket. It was a little box containing one of her lost jewels: or rather, part of one. As Jones' "luck would have it," it happened to be the oldest and dearest of all. It was the central opal of a lovely pendant she had worn during her honeymoon, a thing full of milky mystery and colored flashes, with a shimmering blue light at its heart which had seemed to Violet's childish mind miraculous. Violet, naturally, having had it in childhood, would have recognized it anywhere, in its setting or out. So would her father, Sir Claude. And even so, it appeared, did the well-trained terrier Jones.

"How *could* you remember?" said Violet, cuddling it in her two hands, stars in the gray eyes lifted to him, infinitely pleased. Before she addressed him, she had been talking to her opal, it should be mentioned, as though Jones had not been there. "I thought I should never see that little moving sun again. I wore it on Sundays in the country sometimes, and when it came about the Spirit

moving on the waters in what they read, I used to think of it and watch it all the time. I am sure that is how the Spirit moved. I *do* love chipped stones,—it is rather idolatrous really. To worship it in church was naughty, but I was young. How *did* you remember, Mr. Jones?"

"I couldn't be sure," said Marmaduke, a trifle flushed. "But it looked to me like yours, and I thought it worth trying. I found it by a fluke, turning over some other things, you know,—not in Paris, but here. The fellow could not tell me how they got it, they never can. You showed me it once," he added.

"Did I? And you remembered? You must have a natural eye for jewels, like Father. Oh, I should like to introduce you to my father, Mr. Jones. He would thank you for this, at least as much as I. It's silly how we love little bits of color, both of us. It makes us rather mad at times, in the opinion of our sensible acquaintance."

But Jones, distinctly of her sensible acquaintance, did not think her mad merely because she made little remarks to a ray of light in a stone, and asked it where it had been, and embraced it with gentle lips when she thought his eyes were off her. These proceedings, mad or sane, earned him the purest pleasure he had known for months, as well as some relief. For he had not been perfectly sure the thing was hers until he watched her unpack it and saw her face. Of course, even had it been a stranger opal, she might have accepted it; but it was far preferable that it should be her own, and so no uncomfortable questions asked. It never even occurred to Mrs. Shovell, "mad" as she was, that he had paid money to recover it: and for that oblivion Jones thanked his gods. The people who forget, in a natural rapture,—the rapture of a child, an artist or a religious devotee,—all about money occasionally, were the people who in life appealed to Jones. It only showed once more, had such a thing needed demonstration, that she was all he thought her: and she

was even lovelier than he remembered, in her soft-colored winter clothes.

He had "no luck" in his call, really, for it seemed Mrs. Shovell was going out.

"What a pity you did not come earlier!" she said, for the second time; and he learnt that in spite of the frozen fog, through which he had groped to find her house, she was walking some distance, to take tea with a Lady Brading. Jones would have liked to assure her that the weather, in his opinion, was unfit for her or her clothes either; but he only said—"Oh, yes,"—and looked uncomfortable.

Personally, he had come on business, of course; to see if Shovell was at home, to return the jewel, and for one other little matter he proceeded modestly to mention. Had Mrs. Shovell, or Lady Ashwin, by any chance, got a good photograph of Miss Lisette? The police had one, but it was not, in his judgment, a good one: would not identify her beyond dispute. Since he happened to be there, he had thought he just might——

"Of course," said Violet, in her definite tone, her eyes dreaming the while on Jones' blushing face. "Yes . . . I was only thinking——" She seemed to be only thinking for a minute or two, then she spoke clearly. "I really have nothing the least worthy, nor Mother,—except the miniature. Ledger, her father's master, did that,—a very good man. She sat to him often, too, which makes it safer as a likeness, doesn't it? Mother gave it me when she was changing the pictures in her room one day, and I have kept it by me ever since."

The statement thus made to Jones was colored slightly, for Violet had found the Ledger miniature, banished from the boudoir, face downward in a drawer. She had assumed it without scruple, for she knew well it would never see the light again by Eveleen's choice; and it stood by her bedside, in company with another portrait,—that of a friend she had loved and lost in childhood.

"I am just going to put on my hat," she observed to Jones, "and I will bring it down. Are you going towards the town, by any chance? We might walk together across the gardens."

"Oh yes," said Jones. "Thanks: that would be ripping." He gasped, when she left him alone. He was a creature of habit, to a really absurd degree. Just because it chanced she had generally talked to him, walking at his side, his highest ambition was to repeat the experience. And in London, he had told himself severely, to cherish such a hope was absurd.

It was some time before she returned to the drawing-room, the miniature portrait in her hand. She had had to detach it from its frame, she explained; a double one, containing another portrait, with which she need not trouble Mr. Jones. He wondered foolishly, frantically indeed, if the other portrait had been hers. Of course, when one comes to think it over, a young woman does not keep her own portrait in her room,—but Shovell might. Jones was genuinely sorry not to see Shovell, because that way, he might have heard something worth hearing. This way, he only heard of Miss Lisette.

All the same, when he took the little painting in his hands he exclaimed in involuntary admiration. It was a beautiful thing, and very like, especially as to the lovely coloring. That was what no photograph could ever give,—a commonplace, but Jones said it, and Violet earnestly agreed. She left it in his hands after a minute, and walked away, looking back at him once or twice from the window, as he pored over Ledger's portrait of Lisette. He pored long, as a lover might, or a connoisseur of fine painting,—or a sleuth-hound who had rather forgotten the original. But of that latter alternative, Mrs. Shovell (being a sentimentalist) did not think.

"Please keep it," she said definitely, as he would have handed it back. "It couldn't be in better hands, and it is some slight return for this." She was clasping her opal

still, nursing it unobtrusively in one hand, up near her breast.

"You mean—I may have it?" said Jones, amazed.

"Please.—Let me pack it for you."

She packed it, while he wondered, in layers of soft paper and pink wool, for it was evidently dear to her. She was giving him a thing that was dear to her, an intimate thing, over which, perhaps, she had dwelt herself a little, every night. Prayed?—Marmaduke was not sure: but all the thoughts of such a girl were as good as prayers, he believed. That was an article,—a late article,—of his belief. The stiff aunt who left him the fortune might easily not have approved of it at all. Yet Jones believed,—he had thought so more than once,—his own mother would have loved Violet.

After that they started, when she had assumed a feathered hat,—not the same one,—thrown some furs about her, and put the jewel in her muff "to show Margery." She also apologized nicely for wasting so much of Jones' valuable time, and walked light-footed beside him for at least a mile; for, since we have turned back in history a little, this was the period when Violet was still active, at her most sociable, conquering the world.

He did not hear her news, naturally; but she heard all his, since her questions about France happened all to be easy ones to answer. Jones had noticed this about Mrs. Shovell's way of questioning before: that any fellow could talk to her, and satisfy her curiosity. What she wanted to know was what he could tell her, and she could enlarge upon the most ordinary things,—as once she had enlarged upon the weather,—entertainingly. Besides, when one enjoys a soft tone, it matters little what it says: and Jones, his ear still vexed and jarred by the hard Parisian voices, and their perplexing speech, was the more easily charmed by hers.

He confessed to her as they walked this recurrent trouble about the foreign language. That and his appear-

ance were against him when he haunted the places in Paris where Lisette might be. They found him amusing,—and Marmaduke, who had always taken himself rather seriously, was surprised. Mrs. Shovell laughed into her large muff,—laughed at him, evidently,—but somehow he did not mind that. She asked his pardon the instant after, and explained why she had laughed.

“I don’t think you are at all especially English in appearance,—but they are so funnily quick to see. Sometimes I think it is our expression,—our way of taking things. We can’t look careless and comically critical, which is the proper Parisian attitude. Even Father, with all his practice, hardly can. We—we mind much too much.”

We!—She included herself. She “minded” then, as well! Still, of course her father had never taken her to those places which Jones had been haunting during his autumn visits to Paris. The idea was outrageous: and Sir Claude, though he had been a medical student in his time, would be careful, exquisitely. It was a consolation to Jones to think so, anyhow. He had an idea Sir Claude would have exactly his own views about women,—girls, at least. He had shuddered at times even to think of Miss Lisette, with her shell-like English coloring and clear strange eyes, in some of those places. But in the case of Miss Lisette, who has passed into the pitiful department of Jones’ being, he did not shudder often. The shudder was general, so to speak. It had been shuddered once for all, years since. Work was what applied to a case such as that of Miss Lisette, vigorous work, not whimpering.

At the Lancaster Gate they parted, since their roads diverged; each with their little packet, they went their ways. They exchanged no promises or protestations at parting: it was not necessary, since they were of one mind. Violet took for granted if she could be of any assistance he would let her know. Jones took for granted

her claim,—immediate claim,—to whatever news he had. He seemed to have her peculiar sympathy, too, in his self-imposed quest, by the kind way she looked him in the eyes.

“It’s so much *nicer*, dear Margery, don’t you think?” said Violet, when Lady Brading’s crowded tea-party had dispersed, and with no more serious obstacle than the baby to divide them, Violet had leisure to tell her the latest edition of Jones. “More comforting, in the case, when you consider it, pathetic as it naturally is. I had always rather people were human, not humane. Here’s Robert,—I’m sure he’ll agree with me.”

Robert evidently thought it probable, but he needed to pick up a few details before he would commit himself, even to agreement with Violet. Opinions, in the case of Robert, were serious and weighty things, and women tossed them about far too freely. He heard details solemnly, while Margery, across the head of his son and heir, served him with tea. Luckily he had foundations to work upon,—very luckily, since Violet was in an erratic mood. The Bradings shared nonsense with the Shovells, as a rule,—that is, when Charles did not go too far; and Robert and Margery had long since been treated to the narrative of Marmaduke Jones.

“I can’t really believe in loving humanity,” said Violet, walking about the room, and coming to a halt at intervals to argue with one or the other, as seemed most appropriate and desirable. “One does not, it is impossible. I don’t love the people I meet in ’buses or trains,—I deeply disapprove of their expressions generally, and the selfish way they keep the window shut. If one in the corner is nice-looking, I love her naturally; or if another begs my pardon, or picks up my purse, I love him instantly, always,—I watch his face affectionately till he gets out. . . . But the bulk,—no, I reject them. Though I always supposed people like Robert or Mr. Jones would

hold the broader view, and snub me for personal particularizing,—wouldn't you?"

"Not necessarily," said Robert, looking at Bobbin and Margery. "Proceed, Violet,—only do sit down."

"I can't," said Violet, "when my emotions have been stirred; you ought to remember that. Bobbin, on the top of Mr. Jones *and* my opal, is really quite too much. . . . I never hoped to discover the personal element in Mr. Jones, Margery; he always seemed to me, with his eagle glance, from an eminence, to embrace humanity. He watched from his mountain-walls,—like Robert."

"Do leave Robert alone," said Margery. "He's having his tea."

"In Charles," said Violet, changing the issue, "the personal element is strong, and the eminence imperceptible. In Margery, the personal element is exaggerated—and delicious. I shall kiss it in a minute. In Robert, it seems to vary according to the time of day. In Mr. Jones, it seemed to me to be wanting altogether,—he would not ever particularize the sea-gulls, I remember. They were just birds, to be admired *en masse* for their grace, or condemned for their greed. He would not except *my* sea-gull, or *his* sea-gull, though they were quite different in the expression of their wings. I noticed it as a symptom in him at once. . . . I passionately admired Mr. Jones, of course,—so did Charles, really,—but he had not quite come close to me, if you understand, till this afternoon. Then, for the first time, over that lovely Ledger thing, it struck me,—with what relief I need not say,—that he was acting in this beautiful manner, not in the cause of Humanity,—but of himself."

"Isn't she awful?" murmured Margery into her baby's curls. "Isn't she a perfectly shocking step-aunt, Bobbin?"

"D'you mean the little fellow was in love?" demanded Robert, calmly eyeing Violet from where he sat, broad-shouldered, in his chair.

"In love, yes. . . . Almost in adoration. Beautifully unconscious of it,—one of the most tragic figures I have ever seen. . . . Though I believe some of our great tragedians were short men," added Violet dreamily. She had reached the window in her perambulation, and finding the street-lamps through the fog particularly beautiful, she stopped there, pondering. Behind her back the Brading pair exchanged a glance, humorous and indulgent.

"Relieve our minds," said Robert, after a pause. "Shovell's oldest friends are trembling, Violet."

"Are they? Why?—Robert, really! You might be Charles. Don't make that kind of joke, I warn you,—it's not your style. Charles does it better, though even he gave it up quite soon. I am quite prepared to find this evening that Charles has accurately grasped Mr. Jones' condition, for ages past."

"He has," said Robert. He reached for the tea-pot, since Margery was engaged.

"What? You mean you know? Both of you?" Violet swung from one to the other, reproachfully. "Well, I do call that horrid of you all, to leave me out! It's nothing to laugh at, Margery. A convention is a convention, I consider; ask your husband. We shall never get anybody's private affairs straight unless we work together. People will call us gossips, and all sorts of nasty names,—and they'll be right."

"Spare your severity," said Robert. "Spare Margery, anyhow, and let me explain. You didn't happen to be present when we were last on the Jones tack,—you were seedy. We thought, naturally, Shovell would go home and share with you. Even if he hadn't done so already," added Robert. He shook the tea-pot, his eyes still on Violet. As there seemed to be nothing within, he put it down, regretfully.

"Well, you have taken the wind out of my entire narrative," said Violet, having stood for some moments be-

tween them, in pallid desperation. "I might just as well sit down in that other chair."

"Do, darling," said Margery. "Even Marmaduke is hardly worth so much exertion."

"The truth is," said Violet, breaking out suddenly again, after an interval of painful thought; then she ceased, as suddenly. "Robert, you're thirsty. I shall make you some fresh tea."

"I'd rather you sat down," said Robert, mechanically protesting, as he delivered up the tea-pot. "It's Margery's job, really, only——" he glanced at Margery. "I could do it myself, only——"

"Only she's looking," said Violet. "That's Charles' excuse as well. Charles made tea in perfection, at Cambridge, for the men. Sometimes I wonder, considering his cowardice of the kettle, what it was like."

"Not like this," said her host, in duty bound, accepting her ministrations; for, rapidly as she talked, Mrs. Shovell acted more rapidly still. "Awfully good of you, really, Violet. Thanks. Now go on with Jones; we're listening."

"Where was I?" said Violet.

"At the truth," said Robert, with a twinkle. "We'd just got there. The truth is——"

"Oh yes. The truth is, Robert and Margery, I was rather worried, fussing internally, when Mr. Jones talked about Lisette to me. That's what it must have been. I really could not notice his expression much, though of course I should have guessed. Charles' mind was at leisure, quite,—it generally is for that sort of thing. Why he did not convey his discovery at once to me," said Violet, her brow knitting, "is a more serious question,—much. I shall go into that this evening. Considering the beautiful confidence that exists between you two, and the way you betray your inmost thoughts, invariably, to one another,—you're doing it at this minute,—it is too humiliating to attempt it here. . . . There is, admittedly to the best of us, a kind of free-masonry

amongst men,—yes, married men, Margery, as well. I do Charles the justice to believe”—Violet’s utterance grew more painful as the pain of her subject increased,—“that he did his level best to share Jones fairly with me. But when it came to the climax,—the really exquisitely touching climax,—of another Man’s narrative——”

“Well?” said Robert, smiling, as she paused.

“Charles’ sex was *plus fort que lui*. That’s all,—mine is at times. I forgive him, Robert.” She smiled wanly herself, and turned aside.

“This is really a funeral oration,” said Robert to Margery. “Her image of Marmaduke Jones is shattered really,—she is mourning a lost ideal. That’s as far as I’ve got,—where are you?”

“I’m at Lisette,” said Margery gently. “I have stuck there,—I do whenever the name comes up. You never saw her, Robert.”

“No,” said Violet, in the same soft tone. “Robert never did.”

Sir Robert raised his brows. He had no earthly desire to look at girls like that, if only these two nice girls would believe him. Women will run men into classes, but really, he did not belong to that class at all. He liked and admired Violet, and he loved Margery, once for all. He had no sisters, and had known few young women well, except these two. He had simply no wish to look at others, unless to interview a nursemaid occasionally. That fell under his duties, according to him, when his son and heir was in question, at least from time to time.

“Sit down, Violet,” he said, almost sternly. “You look so tired. Never mind Jones,—what can Jones matter, compared with you?”

“It isn’t Mr. Jones she minds about,” said Margery. “Is it, love?” Violet stood near her, absently dangling her fur tails for Bobbin’s diversion. “We don’t think about Mr. Jones.”

The girls' eyes met, and Robert saw it, and had immediately a new lease of his late thoughts. He added to them rapidly, like a clever builder. The intervention, so to speak, of Margery's mind, recognized as a mother-mind, made it clear to him. That, then, was how these two girls, the girls of his little world, thought of that other, Lisette. It brought Lisette into his ring at once, that pitiful look in Margery's soft eyes, that patient bend of Violet's graceful neck.

"They're not wanting any help for that business, I suppose?" he said abruptly, breaking the silence. Mrs. Shovell, without turning, shook her head.

"Money, you mean?—they have heaps. There's Father, and the Ingestres now, not to mention Mr. Jones."

"Oh, he's well-to-do, is he? . . . He would be, of course, to get that stone back for you," Robert added reflectively.

Violet turned about, and, brows up, gazed at him.

"Don't insult my opal, Robert," she said, very gravely. "Fortunes could not buy it, or bring it back to me. Money could never do it,—Something Else was necessary. I am talking to Bobbin now, because he understands. I believe, Bobbin, that now the opal has returned to me, Lisette will. There is a finger pointing to it, inside me. It is not a heavenly prompting, the least,—it would shock Mr. Jones, and your good father, most deeply. Your cousin is a superstitious stone-worshiper, and it is as well for your precious soul," said Violet, pensively swinging her fur, "that she is once-removed."

Sir Robert and Lady Brading, when Mrs. Shovell had gone, relaxed their pose of grave attention, and laughed.

"Shovell's not let on, then," said Robert. "Why is that?"

"Jealous, I shouldn't wonder," said Margery. "Charlie is perfectly capable of being jealous, even of a

Jones. You kept your face splendidly, Bob,—I was laughing into Bobbin's hair. Something else necessary!—Dear thing, I should think so! She lectured us so nicely, didn't she? I do like to see Violet make herself really ridiculous,—it's not her way."

"I wish she didn't look so white," said Robert, still rather sternly. "If I were Shovell, I should be anxious. Why can't she let other people's interests go, and rest?"

"Because she wouldn't be Violet if she did," said Margery. "I wouldn't have her different, anyhow, and I doubt if Charlie would, in his heart. Besides, she does make time to rest; she's very good. She has made simply the most heavenly little clothes you can imagine, Bob. Baby and I are jealous since we saw them,—aren't we, love?"

"She's a kind of professional, isn't she?" said Robert.

He alluded to Mrs. Shovell's pursuits before her marriage, known to him and Margery, since their romance and hers had coincided. But still, in spite of such righteous activities on Violet's part, Robert remained anxious about her. She was not, to quote the formula of her friends when challenged as to such vague disquietude, a common girl.

III

Marmaduke Jones succeeded.

Whether it was by virtue of his steady purpose and self-devotion, of the moving light in Violet's opal, or,—more probable than all,—by virtue of the radiance of that rarer jewel, beauty wellnigh perfect in our working-day world, Lisette was heard of before that winter quite ran out; and from being heard of to being seen, and from that to being saved, were steps for such as Jones and his fellowship comparatively simple to take.

It is no more than plain fact that beauty, such as the Ingestres at their best attained to, is not easy to cover up: so far Jones' curious faith was justified by common

sense. Eveleen Ashwin could not conceal her name in one of the most populous hotels in London: and Lisette Addenbroke failed in the same manner to hide her face in a more curious and critical community, the half-world of Paris. Involuntarily, wherever she was, her odd little personality came to the surface, and her beauty shone there, a light to the distant seeker.

Jones wrote to Charles, neatly as usual, but in terms that betrayed both excitement and exasperation. News had come to him second-hand, in his home near Leatherhead, that a girl like Lisette had been seen in an art-gallery in Paris, some time since, towards Christmas. She had been noticed, as it chanced, by a young artist, friend of a "fellow" Jones knew in Paris. The "fellow," struck by the friend's description, had sent for the Ledger miniature, and the friend had instantly declared it the same girl. He could not be mistaken, he said, because of the lovely hair. Being a painter, and an impressionable party as well, the young man had been able to describe his discovery in some detail, and he had also made a few inquiries. Fragments of the friend's enthusiastic description were handed to Jones, who in his turn picked out the more salient features for Charles. They were certainly arresting, even to the cynical mind.

She was clad in plain black and rather pale, but had been seen to smile more than once, biting her lip between, when the man who appeared to be on guard over her addressed her remarks. She herself was painting, copying a picture, and she worked with great ease and deftness while she talked. While she answered, rather, for, listen as he would, the by-stander could not catch a phrase long enough to determine her nationality. He had had a look at the man, however, and described him as neither old nor young, well and quietly dressed, quite a decent-looking fellow. The girl had addressed him as Edmond once, pronouncing it French fashion. Since the man did not move away, but kept at her elbow looking

round him jealously, Jones' fellow's friend had had to go, with some hope of finding her the following students' day, since her painting was in the early stages. Needless to say, she had not returned, and the baffled friend proceeded to inquiries, quite as though he had been a sleuth-hound in the making. Counting upon her unusual appearance, he was not disappointed. The fair-haired girl had been noticed by the *vestiaire* at the entrance of the hall, who said she had come twice with the same man. They knew the face of the man, and believed he was a young "*collectionneur*" of some importance. Without the hall, the policeman at the gate had also noticed her,—Frenchmen, Jones observed in passing, seemed better than English in this way,—and thought she had arrived by a certain line of omnibus. This fixed the side of the river, and the southeast quarter, very vaguely; but vague or no, wild or not, Jones was going straight to Paris to interview the "fellow," examine the friend, scour the quarter, and watch the public places, picture-galleries above all. It had evidently not struck Jones in any definite form before that it would be well to look for Lisette in the world of art: he had only thought, with the prejudice of his kind, of the fashionable theatrical: yet, of course, it was more probable, as a hunting-ground, since both actively and passively, as craftsman and model too, Lisette's natural endowment was so remarkable.

At the time when Jones' letter came, Violet's nervous state had been vexing her father's mind; and, though her own doctor made nothing of it, with an experienced shrug and smile, Charles decided, on reflection, to tell her nothing of this report. It was too vague, and already of old date. The fact that it had been sent to him, and not to her, suggested that Jones also was modest as to its worth. Merely to learn that her cousin was in Paris would be small solace to Violet, only added torment to an imagination already overstrained. No more might ever be heard of Lisette, quite easily; especially if she

were being so closely guarded. That it was not the same guardian was reassuring, so far as it went. She might, by a happy chance, have fallen into good hands: but even there the evidence was frail.

However, Violet's talisman, or Jones' luck, held good. About a fortnight later, Charles called one night at the house in Harley Street, and inquired, with a particularly harassed face, for Sir Claude.

The footman, to his astonishment, muttered rapidly: "Not Miss Violet, sir?"—and had to be reassured by a brief word before he went his stately way. Evidently the electric influence that had overset the footman's dignity passed on through the house. The doctor's secretary swung brusquely out of the study into the hall.

"Sir Claude's engaged," he said, drawing himself up unconsciously, head back, like a young soldier facing fire. "Is it anything?"

"No," said Charles, looking at his eyes. "I've got to see him, though, somehow, privately. When can I get him, Ford?"

"Sit down," said Ford, pointing to the chair he had quitted. "I'll go and see. He told me not to disturb him,—if the heavens should fall. He's writing against time for the Press."

"If you get the sack, I'll make it up to you," said Charles, dropping into a seat. "Or she will, anyhow. It's got to be to-night."

He waited in a quiet house, growing ever more anxious; for the doctor was as hard as royalty, in these days, to see. Charles had never, since his schooldays, felt so nervous as he felt in that long interval; except on one other occasion,—an interview he had undergone in this same room,—and then Violet had been backing him. He had a vision, as he waited, of the sprite she was, thought of his girl at home, and bowed his head in his hands, his purpose strengthening. She was right within the sanctuary of his temple: no unsightly miseries of the outer

world, by any negligence of his, should touch her now. The gods themselves would hold her above the storm. So thought Charles unwitting, or having forgotten since his schooldays, what the gods were like.

After some twenty minutes, his father-in-law came in. Charles sprang up, flushing, with an apology.

"You have spoilt my article," said Sir Claude in his soft tone with composure, "and I used an unhallowed word. I recommend Ford for the Victoria Cross to-morrow. Now,—out with it, Charles."

"I'm going behind Violet," jerked Charles in agitation, his back half-turned. "For the first time. I've not told her a thing about it, but I must cross by the early boat to France to-morrow. I've got to,—I simply see no other way."

"There is no way, but by boat," said Claude, with his most serious air of attention. "Pussy's not worse?" he added.

"You know she's not," said Charles resentfully, "or you wouldn't talk like that."

"I know she is not, from Ford's complexion. Take it easy, then, can't you? Sit down."

"Aren't you in a hurry?" said Charles, surprised. The doctor was always in a hurry.

"No. I tell you the article is spoilt—and posted. I condensed it, and the asses will miss the points. You've all night if you want. Sit down."

"You really are awfully kind." Charles sat down, and revised his thoughts. "It's like this. I opened one of her letters to-night, because I knew the handwriting."

"Man or woman?" said Sir Claude.

"A young man,—friend of hers."

"Very good, that's the beginning of the end. You naturally come to me about it, but I can't do anything."

"Shut up!" snapped Charles. "No, really, it's too bad. I'm not fooling,—it's serious." He looked at the doctor's eyes, and saw at once that he was serious too,

whatever his tongue might say. He was simply, on instinct, managing Charles' nerves, and Charles felt better for the treatment.

"You always have," he said earnestly, "been awfully good to me. I can't think why. The more I know of her, the more I wonder." Claude snapped his fingers, merely. "The letter, as I guessed, was about that poor girl, Miss Addenbroke."

"Miss Honoria?"

"Lisette." Charles looked aside, for neither he nor Violet knew exactly where her father was in the *Affaire Lisette*.

"Ah," he said simply. "Have they news of her?"

"More than news. They have herself. This man has got her with him, in his hotel. It's really almost a miracle," said Charles dubiously, "when you come to think."

"Miracles occur," said the scientist, "granted the man. Who is he?"

"The secretary of the S.P.X.Z. We met him on our wedding journey."

"Oh, Lord!" The doctor dropped into a chair. "Hold on a second, Charles." He plunged his head in his hands. During the interval before he lifted it again, he dived into memory, brought up an inconspicuous secretary, placed him, took his measure, and linked him on to John Ingestre's reports, and on to another talk with his daughter in this room.

"That's the man who did not take Violet's trinkets," he observed pensively. "Yes. . . . It was Lisette who did. Naturally. . . . You all came up together in the train that night. I wonder why I never thought of that! . . . I wish to heaven you'd post me at the time," he snapped, "and not six months after. I'm getting too old for such a strain."

"On my word, sir, I wish I had. It would have saved a lot of wretchedness. But Violet thought——"

"I know she thought. We might have stopped her thinking. That would have been clear gain to all, and most to her." He hung silent again, considering wearily. It struck Charles he looked older and more disheartened lately, bright as his eyes still were.

"I suppose you know everything," he modestly suggested. "Don't you?"

"I suppose I do, yes: and it's just worth the effort of compiling. But Pussy has been bothered—rather hideously, I am afraid." Another weary pause. "Charles," he said suddenly, "will you let me ask your forgiveness for lending such a torment to existence, your first year? It's only the shreds of the old; she will soon get rid of them, when the new arrives. But it remains hard on you to have lost so much."

"Don't,—for Lord's sake! She has not let me lose—anything. You're as bad one as the other. There's simply nothing I can say." Charles took the extended hand, overcome for a moment by real humility, an emotion he seldom felt. "You are simply too awfully good," he repeated, wishing earnestly as he spoke that someone would shoot his mother-in-law, soon,—that night if possible. But since it seemed an unlikely consummation, he saw nothing for it but to pursue, with the facts.

"This little fellow—name of Jones—had a good look at Lisette—can't help calling her that, 'cause V. does, sorry,—saw V.'s anxiety about her,—and, from the minute we left her, stuck to her like wax. Little Jones do anything in the world for my wife," said Charles; "like most of us. You may laugh. I told Brading, anyhow, and he was not the least surprised. Ford wouldn't be either,—you just try him. He—he'd chuck you for her, to-morrow."

"Thanks," said Sir Claude. "I had suspected it, but I hope he won't."

"He won't now,—like to see him! Confound you," jerked Charles, "you're on to everything. I say, I

oughtn't to speak to you like this." He seemed a little surprised at himself, and stopped. Sir Claude sat, "watchfully blinking," liking him better every moment. So very few people in the world "cheeked" Dr. Ashwin, or had ever cheeked him, that he appreciated the sensation. Violet did, of course, but to have it from a man was better fun. You will meet a few superior minds, up and down the world, that adore to the end the insolence of healthy youth, and Claude's was one.

"How did Jones find Lisette?" he said, gently goading Charles.

"Goodness knows. He doesn't go into it. Some extraordinary stroke of luck. . . . He heard she'd been seen somewhere, and roped her in, bit by bit. Then he saw her in a crowd on Sunday, in a park,—I don't know Paris,—Mont——"

"Monceau," said Claude: and corrected instantly, "Montsouris."

"That's it,—one to you," said Charles kindly. "There was a big crowd—some sight or other. Jones dodged some men—it was a whole crew—and got a word with her. She chaffed him, you know, for following her,—she would: she's the devil's own pluck, that girl: but she noticed the address he gave. That's clear by what happened later."

"Did nothing happen at the time?"

"Yes,—a row happened. A row generally does with French fellows, doesn't it? One of the men saw Jones speak to her, followed him to a quiet place, and went for him. He's spunk enough," said Charles, stretching his fine limbs unconsciously, "but not much else. He got bowled over, and broke his ankle. Beastly bad luck on the little chap, I call it. They were two or three to one. If that's what they call fair fighting——"

"They don't," said Claude. "Leave the French alone, if you don't know them, I advise you. There's too much cheap talk, by far. Does Mr. Jones need help, now?"

"No." Charles stared rather. "Money, you mean? He's got heaps. It's help for the girl he wants. You see—she has come to him."

"Ah, that's bad. They'll be after her. Beauty is notorious over there in no time. There would be a hundred spies along the streets."

Charles bit his lip. "That's it. He's horribly bothered,—and tied by the leg. Hardly knows the language even,—awfully handicapped. It's not fair on him,—that's why I must go."

"Why not Ford?" said the doctor quietly. "He's capable."

"Thanks awfully, sir,—but it's Violet's business, do you see, and that means it's mine. Besides," said Charles awkwardly, "I've a notion a married man is best."

Claude opened his mouth to scoff, saw his son-in-law's face, and swallowed the words unuttered. "Is the girl ill?" he said.

"Almost off her head—and a child coming. It's a woman's work," said Charles.

A dead pause while the doctor thought, his brow furrowed in its darkest lines. He ran through his female relations, the Ingestres being one by one dismissed as hopeless. Margery Brading was too young, John's wife too old.

"Your mother, Charles," he then said.

"Mother's in Sicily for the holidays,—I thought of her." He dared not look up, in the next pause. Claude balanced Eveleen finally, and dismissed her.

"Violet would have gone," he said, as if to himself.

"Like a shot, yes. She'd go at this minute if I let her see the letter. That," said Charles, "is what I mean. At the worst, she'd have sent me, wouldn't she? I mean, of course, barring you. You're too busy," he added quickly.

"Business," echoed Claude, "that always bars the essential thing. All the important offices of life go by me,—have for years. Now I can't even take your place

at Violet's side. She won't have me,—Why? I've lost my nerve, for the things that matter. She's too much to me,—and I show it,—and she suffers. I'd better go to Paris for her, Charles. I know the tongue."

Charles sat awed: such fierce suffering, past and present, came through the tone in those few short phrases. It had not struck him to consider, ever, what lay behind the mask of easy languor the doctor turned to the world.

Before he could speak—"I can't, of course,"—his father-in-law resumed: "I'm speaking in dreamland." He got out his engagement-book, glanced through it, and tossed it on the table. "I'll send Lady Ashwin to Victoria," he said, smoothing his hair back with one fine hand. "To Dover, if she'll go,—to meet you. You are right, of course,—a woman should be there. Poor little solitary,—no belongings worth the name. Eveleen will bring her back here, naturally."

Charles made one of the efforts of his life, and said, "Good,—Lisette likes her," in a tone that rang true.

"Likes my wife?" said Claude, bitterness vanishing in pure surprise.

"She said so, in her letter to Violet. She liked her better than her own people, she said. I think she was really attracted. She would be glad to see her, I am sure."

"Ah! . . . Thank you, Charles. That's useful, and very probably true." He paused, lost in thought. "She's nice to look at, of course," he said absently; "that's something."

Charles did not smile. "Anyone," he declared, "would like to see anybody so beautiful. Especially at that hour of the morning."

"Night boat?" Claude looked at him ruefully. "Oh, Lord,—well, I'll have her roused at five. She may get off, with luck." After a pause, having risen, he added, "How are you managing to shirk yourself, by the way? Have you the chief in your pocket to that extent?"

Charles told him details, and the talk passed gradually to other things. There was only one further allusion to Eveleen in the conversation, all very friendly and soothing to Charles: when the doctor asked if she had come, as directed apparently, on such a day, to take her daughter for a drive. Charles had to admit Mrs. Ingestre had come once or twice, but not Violet's mother.

"Oh well," said Claude, "it may be better so."

Better, he meant, if his wife held off altogether from Violet at this stage, as she had seemed inclined to do of late. It certainly simplified things, for both households, if she chose that course; and it spared her husband perpetual double thinking, as it were, which, in the present stage of his professional business, he could hardly tolerate.

IV

But there is no reckoning with a sense of injury, in man or woman either; it spurs even such idlers as Lady Ashwin to do unaccustomed and distasteful things. To seek her daughter's society out of kindness may well have been remote from her habits at this time; but to seek her, even to seek her promptly, when she found herself in need of anything her daughter could supply, was no more than an ancient habit revived.

Claude, expert in her mentality as he was, by reason of other distractions, just failed to follow her mind on this occasion. He was caught in the season's fullest rush, seeking ways and solutions for innumerable problems in other lives besides his own: and it just did not strike him, in the few serious words he spoke to his wife on the subject of the girl Lisette, that he put a new means of attack on Violet into her hands. He had once, in the stress of argument, called her mad, but, student of the diseased will as he was, he did not reckon to the full with her formless mania. Eveleen's quiet and rather cowed reception of his brief directions to rise early,

drive to the station, receive and bring back the girl, was, so far as it went, reassuring. She was decidedly reduced by his sweeping methods of late, and would never completely meet his eyes. She knew, somehow, as even the stupidest and most selfish wives may know, that she had cut Claude to the heart by refusing his hospitable roof and capable protection to Lisette in her sorest need. She had shamed and almost stupefied him by her conduct, and killed the last spark of faith in her he had. Now he dragooned her simply, rode her down with a force of will he could exert at need, had exerted all his life on the dull and physically inert, though never yet on her. In this case, she learnt, she was to say no word to a soul,—a simple matter for Eveleen usually,—but she was to rise and dress at that unheard-of hour, and go.

"Of course I will," said Eveleen crossly, "if I must. You needn't talk so much about it."

And so she diverted him, successfully. He mentioned the girl had no woman with her, and why she was in need of such countenance. He mentioned she was being escorted to London, adding no names expressly, that her wandering thoughts might not be distracted from the duty in hand. And so leaving her, Claude flattered himself the spring of action he had stimulated in her, or transferred to her from his own overflowing energy, would work without mishap.

But it occurred to Lady Ashwin, by some quite natural and easy processes of thought, since she needed an outlet for complaint, to drop several other small engagements, and go to tea with Violet. Nobody ever listened so well as Violet, really,—she had always been sympathetic with her mother's petty grievances, at least in words. At times her soft voice and neat expressions,—even though they were oddly-chosen Ashwin expressions,—filled a gap for Lady Ashwin that no other could so well supply. Then, even Violet's chatter found its uses,

since it expressed the benevolent, ingenious thoughts behind.

Besides, as the time approached, it did seem too hard a dispensation, that Eveleen should be practically driven, by Claude's sharp phrases,—the full injustice of which sank into her grieved soul by degrees,—to get up before six o'clock on a cold spring morning, in order to meet, with the least possible show of sympathy, the girl she had wronged. It did not exactly occur to Lady Ashwin that Violet might just as well do it: but that had so often been her attitude of mind in a like case that it was at least an easy position to take up, at need.

The need, however, did not immediately arise, for she was softened by a kind reception. The little maid—being a dense foreigner—looked doubtful at her inquiry and went to see, but Violet did not refuse her. It had not even entered Eveleen's ideas that she might, since she walked through life on the assumption that she was welcome everywhere, exactly as a queen would walk. If the question had come up at all, it was decidedly kind of her to call on Violet, on an afternoon when she had heaps of other things to do, and hand her such matters of gossip as she might, through her recent quiet life, have missed.

Her condescension was repaid by the consideration it deserved. Violet, who had a nice little room she called drawing-room,—slightly larger than Lady Ashwin's boudoir,—gave her mother a very good tea, though she chose to languish on the sofa while she dispensed it. She was particularly pleasant, too, and mild,—she did not fuss at all. It was true, she was well-served, so that the necessity of fussing hardly arose. Lady Ashwin remarked with some resentment, in the matter of the attractiveness of the little meal, and the attentiveness of the little maid, that her daughter, "had things very nice" in her new home. Since Violet had left her mother's house, things had stopped being as nice there

as Lady Ashwin could ideally have wished. She had always had an idea that, granted the right person at the head, a large house like hers worked itself. Claude and Violet had never allowed her to think otherwise, and it was a gratifying article of Eveleen's faith that most of the comforts of life came automatically into being. Nowadays, the faith was shaken slightly, since Claude was frequently too busy to scold the erring footmen,—not to mention selfishly refusing the services of his secretary for his wife's errands,—and Violet was unable, apparently, to look in every morning at a house a couple of miles away, to do the food, the flowers, and the fruit. For some time past her daughter had not offered her assistance, even on the occasion of the larger dinner-parties, to which she was not asked.

On inquiring pleasantly after Charles, Eveleen learnt that he had gone to Paris, for twenty-four hours, for the firm. She sat over this piece of information quite a long time, dwelling upon it in its threefold bearing: the place, the period,—and the excuse. She saw the explanation at once as an excuse, of course. "For the firm," of all futility! Lady Ashwin saw quite a number of things, indeed, having full leisure, and a comfortable chair, in which to ponder upon the evidence. It had an awakening quality for her make of mind. While she turned it over, letting all its suggestions sink slowly in, her eyes were on her daughter's face, so unusually pensive and tranquil in the shadow of the room: a tired little face, for all that, as though she had had too much of life, all told, of late. It occurred to Eveleen that it was hard on Violet. From her former position that it was likely to be hard, her thoughts now moved on a stage. In the child's present situation, it really was.

So far, so good: a most maternal attitude. Next, Lady Ashwin had to calculate what the men were "after," in thus misleading her, and the girl, of course, by the way. Such calculation of motives, in her husband's case, was

apt to be complicated, and tiresome to pursue. Claude had omitted to state that Charles was the person who had brought the news of Lisette, and who had gone, without an instant's delay, to meet and bring her home. Claude had omitted it deliberately, no doubt, being fond of Violet: for the fact was hardly creditable to Charles.

So far Eveleen could struggle, easily: all that lay along the line of her capital interest. On the point as to why Claude had granted his wife the information, and the mission, which he expressly withheld from his daughter, Eveleen's awakened intelligence did not dwell. Claude's elaborate efforts to spare Violet all forms of excitement, during the weeks past, had not, of course, escaped his wife's notice, though he might think so. They made her smile, though she frowned at times, when he betrayed his anxiety over the girl too rashly, in her presence. At the period, which Lady Ashwin remembered very well, when she herself had been in Violet's case, Claude had not shown himself a quarter so careful,—though, of course, he always fussed, it was his nature.

Lady Ashwin diverted, with relief, to Charles. What Charles was "after" was likely, in any case, to be simple. Charles was the kind of man Eveleen comprehended, whom she had encountered, in her own experience, by the score. He fell into a class, and that the commonest class of all, the aboriginal. Charles' motives, in his so-called journey "for the firm," could be all too easily unraveled, especially in the light of his mother-in-law's previous comfortably-established convictions about him. It all fitted on to a nicety: indeed, it would hardly be straining truth,—Eveleen's truth,—to say she had predicted it.

Eveleen's mind recurred to Lisette, vivid and graceful and seductive, as she had been that memorable morning at the Langham hotel; and her eyes shifted again upon her daughter, just to compare. Violet was profiting by her mother's unusually prolonged meditations, as it seemed, to go to sleep. She had curled herself a little

on the sofa. Her cheek rested sidelong on her folded hands,—her favorite posture of sleep in childhood, as Eveleen happened to remember. She had not seen much of Violet in childhood, she had left her to the nurses; but she had, once or twice, when her weekly orbit touched the nursery, noticed her sleeping like that. She looked at her now, rather curiously,—she was conscious of a new curiosity. Her dark hair was drooping low on her brow,—that fine brow, so like Claude's,—and her dark lashes were also lowered languidly. Her lips were shut in a melancholy line, as always in repose. That miserable look was Ashwin again,—it meant nothing necessarily, Eveleen knew. Yet she seemed extremely young lying there, delicate, helpless,—rather disturbing. Lady Ashwin, desirous at once of erasing the picture the girl made, and the scruples it evoked, had an idea, and held out her cup to be refilled. It proved a good idea, for Violet roused, uncurled herself, and attended to her natural duties as hostess, in her invariable meticulous manner.

"When will Charles be back?" said Eveleen, with quite a kindly intonation, watching Violet's proceedings with the cup, and admiring her fine little hands. She was suddenly able to admire her,—for reasons which we really despair of interpreting successfully: we prefer to submit the fact.

"To-morrow, early," said Violet. "He has to go on to the office, poor boy, since he has only the one day off. He shall have the best breakfast I can manage first."

"Goodness! What sharp work," commented her mother. "He'll only get an hour or two in Paris, then. I shouldn't have said it was worth it."

"I suppose," said Violet gravely, "that Charles' publishing people think it is. Or they wouldn't send him, would they?"

"I should think not," said Eveleen. "Lucas Warden knowing about you and all." One of Charles' "publish-

ing people," Mr. Warden, was Violet's old friend. She laughed at the remark, and looked at her mother, laughing still, as she handed back the cup.

"You do think the world turns round women, don't you, Mother dear?" she said. "You are one of the few people I know who are quite sure of it. It is rather a comforting view, sometimes. . . . That's right, is it?—or more cream?"

Lady Ashwin took the cream, and considered the question, slightly rolling out her lower lip. "Lucas Warden never married," she observed. "So he probably still talks high-flown stuff about women, but is not really considerate. I don't think it really considerate, I mean, to pick out Charles. There must be plenty of men about the place who would enjoy going to Paris rather than otherwise."

"Suppose," said Violet, looking sidelong under the fingers she had laid to her brow, "Mr. Warden trusts Charles."

"Suppose you trust Charles," said Eveleen, with a laugh. "I shouldn't."

"Explain," said Violet, with the same lingering, sidelong look. It melted even Eveleen, for an instant.

"No, I shan't," she declared, leaning back. "You're not fit for teasing. And, besides, your father says I'm not to. I caught it like anything from your father the last time I did." She looked most beautiful and serene, and the idea of her "catching" anything was attractively ridiculous,—or would have been in more mixed society. Yet its immediate audience was not impenetrable.

"Poor Mother,—did you? I'm so sorry. When was that?"

Lady Ashwin was very nearly vanquished at this point. She had not reckoned on the charm mastering her that she had never let herself feel before. Really, for a moment, she saw what Claude meant,—the "enchantment" was there. There was something in the spirit of

this house, this hearth, the look and tone of this languid girl who was her daughter, linked to her by the nearest earthly tie, that nearly upset her selfish scheming, drifted her from her obstinate preconception, once for all. Her dearest theories were in danger at that moment, and her uncertain look betrayed it.

"You can't stand it," she said, her eye wavering, dropping involuntarily from Violet's face to the couch on which she lay. "Talking about him,—you couldn't before." She added—"I shouldn't let him burn holes in my sofa-covers, anyhow."

"I did not," said Violet. "He let Honoria, when I was not there. She never apologized, either: nasty thing."

"Oh, she wouldn't," said Eveleen. "Charles flirted with Honoria, didn't he?"

"Shamefully," said Violet. "He was an absolute disgrace, at dinner. I had no idea Charles could *be* like that. You ought to have heard him, Mother."

"I have," said her mother, without a smile.

"You mean he does it with you?" She laughed again. "That's how he keeps in practice, is it? And you don't sit upon him? Mother dear, how unfeeling! You might think of me."

Eveleen's fine eyes fixed her, rather blankly. Really, the girl's behavior put her out. She had expected, naturally, from Claude's fussy accounts, to find her excitable, brilliant in consequence, and rather a bore to deal with. She was nothing of the sort; merely friendly and playful, what Eveleen called babyish,—quite passive under this unmasked intrusion upon her peace at the best hour of the day,—quite obvious, even to her mother's understanding, in all she said. She was everything Eveleen could best comprehend and appreciate, to-night: and she was pretty as well, surprisingly, in the spring dusk that became her like a garment, shrouding her and her hopes together.

"Your father says," said Eveleen slowly, when all her instincts had warred for some moments in a disagreeable manner, and nothing had resulted,—“I have got to get up early to-morrow,—go and meet them. It is a great bore.”

“Meet whom?” said Violet, tolerant of accustomed divagation. “Visitors? Can’t the carriage go?”

“I should have thought so,” said Eveleen, relieved by the sensible suggestion. “Joliffe could find them just as well. It’s the early train,—night boat,—isn’t it?”

The question, in three words, was the betrayal.

“You mean Father is sending you to meet Charles?” said Violet, her vague look concentrating, her smooth brow knitting and lifting, just like Claude’s. “Why? You have not heard—there has not been an accident, has there, Mother?”

“No, child. Lie down,—do you hear?”

Eveleen spoke sharply, for the change in face and voice was startling, even to her. In a rush, she regretted everything, and just too late. In that instant, too, she realized that, as always, Claude was right. The girl was excitable,—ill, abnormal, anything you would: everything that her mother had just comfortably denied. Worse, Violet was clever still, in spite of all: there was no evading her, now she had blundered so far. As in a hundred cases with Claude, she thought she had not touched the limit, and could still retract if she would: and found she had crossed it for ever, and could not. Lying itself was useless,—Eveleen’s lying, that is. Lying is an art like other arts, needing study, and Lady Ashwin had never spared the necessary attention to perfect it and keep it fit for service at a sudden need.

Hardly knowing how it came about, under a perfectly relentless shower of keen soft questions, she told her daughter what an hour’s reflection, at this stage of affairs, would certainly have decided her to conceal. She had no choice but reticence, really; it was too late, by

far, for any other course, even had she had the wit to conceive another course open in the first instance. Stupidity, or rather partial thought, is the scourge of our society, much more so than immorality in its franker forms. Half the educationalists recognize the supreme danger, and half do not. Our foggy immorality is, and will be to the end, more ultimately harmful than the intelligent immorality of the French. No Frenchwoman, it is fair to conceive, of Eveleen's caste and upbringing, would have committed the exact crime her sluggish ideas permitted her that night, the thing that was done, effectively, before she left the house; for the simple reason that she would have foreseen, a few minutes before speaking, results which Eveleen refused to realize or recognize until weeks had passed.

"He should have told me," the girl said, fighting her weakness, between gasps that were not sobs. "It is nothing but that I mind. Of course, of course, I will do it, Mother dear. . . . This is nothing,—the surprise,—I am quite well. No right to be otherwise at present. It is Lisette. . . . She will want me, is wanting me now. It hurts, really, to be treated so. I—I am not quite an imbecile, not yet, if they would believe. . . . Oh, Charles,—stupid! How could you?"

She covered her face, quite overcome, shaken from head to foot by the shock, the revulsion of feeling so heartlessly produced, on a mind which Charles' careful acting and cheerful words that morning had left completely at ease. That made it worse for Violet now, of course,—the memory of that parting softness. She could but envisage it as deceit; well-meant, doubtless, but so undiscerning of her spirit's needs. To leave her with a lie like that, and let her hear now, from such a quarter,—her pride was hurt as well. Did they really think her a fool? Had she really given them cause, during her desperate strife with intolerable odds, these latter days, to think so?

Her mother's admirably-timed proceeding made it just as bad for her as possible, tore her peace into tatters,—and there was the night ahead. One cannot govern one's thoughts always, during the night. She might have slept, with the thought of Charles coming back to her, with that same face, in the morning. Now—where was she? She had, being what she was, first to go all the way with her mother's base suspicion, no particle of which, knowing her mother so well, she could escape; and then cast it fiercely from her,—when she did not want at all to think. No grace of partial thought, or half-hearted dallying, possible to Violet. When she was least capable she must stir, seize her discarded weapons anew, and fight to the death, for Charles' honor and her own. To stop her thinking, as Claude said, would have been the only chance of relief; not to set her divining and contradicting, in thoughts that assumed words as they rose, a baseless libel on her husband's love: contemptuously, passionately, loyally rejecting it, thenceforth and for the whole night long.

"Your father knew," observed Eveleen, who had risen, discomposed by the storm she had aroused. She folded up and put away her suspicion hastily, with an admirable resolution to say no more. She was glad she had not gone further, indeed, considering the shock the girl's looks had already caused her. That shock soon passed; but it was evident Violet, in her easy formula, was "not fit for teasing," so she desisted from further experiment. She was "upset," for the moment: but if her mother did nothing, gracefully, for a time, she would soon get over her emotion.

"Your father had heard," she repeated, turned away.

"Yes, yes,—but Charles had seen. How Lisette clung to me, and her letter. . . . I let him read it with me, Mother,—I shared with him. I only ask my share, to be allowed to judge. I need not have gone all the way: of course, the sea is bad. I would have been patient

—sensible—if they had let me think at all.” She bit her lip, her eyes tight shut against tears, still striving for mastery, for the most ordinary means of speech. “A child!—that baby!—oh, of course I must go! Poor little bespattered thing, just from the storm: and frightened,—a night journey,—she so hates the dark. If I had known, she should not have had that. It is the sun,—all the sun possible,—now to the end.”

When she was calmer, she added—“You must not trouble, dear Mother: of course I will go to meet the boat. There is a good train,—nine, I think. It is only to tell Joliffe to fetch me,—would you mind? I should like Joliffe, I am—sure of him.”

“I don’t suppose you ought to, really,” said Eveleen, taken with a scruple, as she glanced at the exhausted young face. “You ought to have someone with you.”

“You,” said Violet, lifting her gray eyes. “You are the person I ought to have. Mother dear, will you take me to Dover? Baby Lisette would like it. It would be—so nice.”

It was a very cunning stroke, as Eveleen decided afterwards. She had hardly thought Violet was so sly. For, slipped in like that unexpectedly, it almost upset her into agreement, on the spot. It did, in truth, seem so “nice,”—so eternally right as well,—that her own mother should take her in charge on such an occasion. Why should she not go with Violet to Dover, when it looked so well, when it would divert Claude’s wrath, not to mention satisfy Eveleen’s own tiresome family, once for all? There was nothing but habitual inertia to prevent her, and for a second even her lazy instincts played her false. It absolutely seemed easier to stoop and kiss this child of hers, who made requests so rarely,—say “yes” with a laugh, and take all the ensuing consequences, good and bad.

“I don’t see the point exactly——” she began mechanically, pondering it with a pouting lip. Whereupon, further pondering was spared her, for Violet interrupted.

"No point,—nonsensical: you mustn't mind what I say. I am going to be extremely wise in my actions, to make up. If Father should get asking, you will tell him that? I don't want Father to be angry, anxious even,—there is no need. Don't let him fuss about me, will you, Mother dear? I am taking Annette, first-class,—everything proper and prudent in the case. It's only Father allows me to be a case at all. My own man thinks me a humbug,—I can see it in the corner of his eye." She laughed a little as she lay quiet, gazing through the mysteries of the twilight, away from Eveleen. "He practically told me yesterday that women had better go back to religion,—less burden to others and themselves. He may be right,—though why we should vex the high Heaven with our mortal fidgets, I rather fail to see. *Wearying* heaven,—isn't that the term?—It certainly would!" She laughed again, though her hands were clenched tightly on the cushions beside her, and her brow knit as tightly above her averted eyes.

Lady Ashwin heard out this and other chatter in silence, thinking it best. She stood at the girl's side looking on, magnificent in her physical power, blankly uncomprehending. She was bored mildly, as usual, yet reassured as well, since Violet had dropped that unusual phase of drowsy idleness, and was talking eagerly, unnecessarily, and like herself again. She did think once—"You'd better take it easier than that,—less words at least." But she did not even say it, she was buttoning her glove.

She had no idea, all the same, of giving Violet's father the opportunity of a like mental exercise, as the child rather amusingly suggested. Claude's embroidery on the subject his wife could do without. Claude, dashing about London all day, interrupted even at meal times with telegrams and messages, could be dodged in his own house very easily,—had been dodged before now. It was distinctly better for the peace of that house that

he should remain in oblivion of his wife's change of plans,—her change of *his* plan, a thing of which Claude was apt to disapprove.

Eveleen could manage the servants without his intervention, the men-servants, at any rate. Feminine service occasionally kicked in Lady Ashwin's god-like grasp; but the excellent chauffeur, and the admirable footman, had never given her an instant's uneasiness. She was obeyed softly and swiftly,—unquestioningly, which in cases like the present was more important. The fact was providential. She had but to tell Joliffe, in her idle fashion, that she had changed her mind, and would not want him in the morning after all; and add, that he could call for Mrs. Shovell, in the small car, towards nine o'clock. Eveleen might even mention an hour with minutes attached, since Violet was particular, and was looking up the train. "Towards nine o'clock" Claude would be still at dinner; and Eveleen could, at need, detain him there and divert his mind. At need—real need—Lady Ashwin would accomplish this with any man, her husband not excepted. With commendable foresight, even while she still buttoned her glove beside the couch, Eveleen decided it would be as well to put on her newest gown. When she left Violet, with the train-hour noted for Joliffe, on a card, she went home, very fairly at ease, to do so.

v

The glare of the great lamps caught Violet's attention as, almost obliterated under her heavy furs, she came out to the gate.

"The big car?" she lightly queried, as she settled the storm-collar under her chin.

"Yes, Miss," said Joliffe: who, even at this stage of things, would not give up the ancient appellation. Since all the other servants followed Joliffe, like sheep, this was rather serious, and Mrs. Shovell had had to tell him so,

in her most definite fashion. Joliffe had received her reproaches gravely, and called her "Madam" once; whereupon the thing had become hopeless, because Miss Violet laughed herself.

"I'll take you to Dover," the man added quietly, to explain.

"Oh, but——" her ungloved hand went up to her breast, in equal uncertainty and relief,—“won't it matter? Does Father know?”

"No, Miss," said Joliffe. "I shouldn't be here if he did."

Sitting at his post, he looked straight ahead of him at the water-streaked, wind-swept road. It was a stormy night, with sharp gusts of wind at intervals,—absurd for so slight a thing as she seemed to be abroad. Even with a bear-skin to ballast her, she was almost blown away. She had laid a hand, unconsciously, upon the gate.

"Joliffe! But you,—your wife! Won't it matter? It's all night,—the boat comes in at three o'clock, you know."

Joliffe knew well, and his wife also. His wife, indeed, had heard the whole of his opinions that evening, when he returned from the doctor's house, and his decorous interview with her ladyship in her private room. Mrs. Mason, in her ladyship's kitchen, had heard his opinions too, since Mrs. Mason and Mrs. Joliffe were intimate friends; though he had spoken in the kitchen more discreetly, for there were younger ears about. And it was in direct consequence of these opinions, offered and exchanged, that Joliffe had stolen his master's traveling-car, filled it with rugs and comforts from the kitchen quarters, and prepared calmly for an all-night run.

"I could find Mr. Shovell, if that's all," said Joliffe, his expression a trifle grim as he glanced round at her. He was not half sure, considering what Sir Claude was, that he was not risking his place by this proceeding, and being naturally a cautious person, he would have been glad to

be assured there was occasion for such risk, all round. Not that he doubted Miss Violet had her reasons,—she invariably had reasons for what she did. There was no doubt the mission was important,—delicate probably as well; only, she was more delicate and important too. In this case, she required strong measures, in Joliffe's opinion: over-bearing,—sweeping into the house and her warm bed again, as Sir Claude would have swept her, even while he kissed her on the way. Joliffe had seen him so "sort" Miss Violet before now, her nature being so like his that even while his tongue raked her with satire, at its keenest, she had laughed and understood.

"It's not all," she assured him, approaching. "Miss Addenbroke is with Mr. Charles, and she is ill. You remember the little Miss Addenbroke,—the pretty one? I think, that day we drove to Glasswell, she sat beside you and made friends."

Joliffe nodded, his lips still grim: but it was with an effort he kept them so. He might be risking his place, but it was worth it: more than worth it, when she stood at his side, her bare hand on his sleeve, and spoke like that.

"We have plenty of time now, haven't we?" she said, her brows lifting as she debated. "Joliffe,—will you come down and talk to me a moment? I will be virtuous and sit inside."

She was virtuous accordingly, and Joliffe enveloped her in several rugs with minute attention. She sent the girl Annette back to the house, directing her to wait, in a few quick French sentences. Then, while the chauffeur stood beside her at the carriage-door, she leant forward, clasped her hands over all the rugs about her knees, and talked to him.

He was hardly astonished by the matter of what she said, having half suspected it already. He was in one of the positions of confidence in which one is bound constantly to overhear,—he was also intelligent and experienced in the life of at least three classes, as skilled

mechanicians of his age and standing are apt to be; but the manner of Miss Violet's talk overcame him completely, as did the sympathetic knowledge she displayed of a world not her own.

She gave him his dues, to begin with; she grasped his position, the position that was Joliffe's secret pride, since he held the most important office in the house, rivaled only by the secretary's, that of saving his master's time. When time has the value of Sir Claude's, it could be no small responsibility, and so Miss Violet admitted, in what she said. Joliffe's family friendship with Mason the cook was no secret to her either, nor the power he wielded over the younger man, and, through Mason, over the younger women of the staff.

Well,—Miss Violet "wished him to know," in consequence,—of course she did. It was no more than a characteristic piece of foresight in a mind that ever, like her father's, swept heedfully ahead, to guard, by quiet explanation in advance, that unfortunate young lady, the pretty little Miss Addenbroke, from probable misconception; to shield her from backstairs whispering, and the slights that superior servants know so well how to deal when they catch their so-called betters in fault. It was a thing, too, that she must have known Sir Claude, with all his benevolence, could hardly attempt to do, and which Lady Ashwin was bound, in the nature of things, to overlook. She was the only one to speak, then, as Joliffe was the best to hear, and so she seized the opportunity of speaking to him in private, while she could.

That was Miss Violet's view,—very simple to her mind, evidently. But to Joliffe it was striking and significant to a degree of which she could hardly be aware, not realizing to the full the light in which Joliffe's world regarded her. She had always been more than "their young lady," though that was much. She had done more, even, than make up to them by heedful kindness for her mother's exactions; she had interpreted her father to his servants'

intelligence. Claude was frequently formidable when he least wished to be: it was a penalty due both to his habit of concentrating his thoughts and utterances, and to natural shyness as well. Violet's sympathetic feminine version of the same character showed them what it meant, and lent more value to both in their idea. She used his expressions in a manner they understood. She talked of him in a fashion to make him familiar. They were proud of "the doctor," and loyal to him, while they trembled: her they adored. It was simply the habit of the household to adore her, and though she had perforce become a tradition rather than a fact, the newer and pertier of Lady Ashwin's importations had to fall in with the domestic rites: Joliffe and Mason saw to that.

But to-night she went a step further in the conquest of this unknown kingdom of hers than ever before. Knowing how she stood,—for of course the elder servants knew,—that she should speak on such a theme at all, above all to such as he, stirred the man to a kind of angry devotion which he was quite unable to express. To say that Joliffe would have laid his life down, that night, for his master's daughter, is to fall short of the truth. The English tradition of service is very fine, criticize who may, and excellently creditable both to masters and servants in the past. Even those who, like Joliffe, have fought themselves free, by their natural talents, of the obligation to serve, often come back to those terms of their own free will, to demonstrate how dignified, on either side, that tradition is. Yet the difficulties of fair communication between served and serving grow every day more considerable, and the obligation is chiefly on the former to discover the particular formula required. There is a manner,—hardly more than one exists,—of conversing across our comical but convenient hedges of class distinction that is infinitely preferable, at least to the small owner, to breaking the hedge down. That process is rarely natural, and, by the peculiar tenets of

English servants, rather impertinent as well; since why should a landmark be suppressed that they see fit to trim and guard? Now, Miss Violet had no appearance of blandly dropping to Joliffe's intelligence, which was, as a fact, nearly as keen as hers. She hardly even cared to translate her own queer language to his ears. A phrase or two was too much for him, for she was rather absent at intervals, and, over the central circumstances, rather shy. Joliffe, with ten years' married experience, could have saved her some trouble there, but, needless to say, he did nothing of the sort.

"I see, Miss," he said briskly, in the successive intervals she left for him, and, while she spoke, stood in his most rock-like manner of attention: the same he used when Sir Claude, of an evening, rattled off times and places for the car, each one essential, the next day.

"Right, Miss Violet," he said finally. "That will be all right. There's a big dinner on to-morrow, and my wife's going in to help."

"Early? Oh, that's luck, isn't it? But you will hardly see Mrs. Joliffe before she goes, at this rate." She laughed. "I should warn you, perhaps. Coming back you will have us both,—no scorching possible on that lovely road."

"It's no distance," said the man contemptuously. "With the easiest going, I daresay we shall get up before the train."

"So long as you don't race it," she said, still smiling with a nervous brow. "If you do, I shall fly at you, probably. I'm cross in the morning, I can tell you,—ask Mr. Charles."

"You can take me up sharp, Miss," said Joliffe solemnly, "I'm used to it." He tucked one of her rugs a little further in.

"Yes,—well, you shall not be for this, I promise. It was kind to think of it, you and Mason too. It's the quiet, you know, and the friendliness,—infinitely nicer

than a train. I could go to sleep here—almost.” She looked beyond him an instant vaguely, then gathered to decision. “Good, then,” she said, “that’s understood,—one thing off my mind, anyhow.” She gave him her little bare hand, adding no further word, of caution or of thanks. She knew when a thing was done, and never hammered uselessly on a well-driven nail. “We had better get off, hadn’t we, and rest at the other end. The sea will be frightful——” she shivered,—“poor things!—Will you tell my maid that I am ready now? She understands English very well.”

That was how Violet began her ride to the coast in her father’s stolen car.

III

UNDINE

I

VIOLET was justified in her premonitory shiver that stormy night. Charles, at about the same time, started on a weary journey, with a terrible charge. Words could hardly express how he dreaded it beforehand, for the girl he escorted was barely reasonable, though tractable enough in her helplessness, and quiet; following all his directions mechanically, moving where he pushed, and resting where he placed her, though he could not leave her for an instant alone, so great was her unreasoning terror of all. He simply dared not look ahead through the weary hours of darkness before he could have her safe, as he felt, on English ground. Lisette was longing for England, but he wondered, at moments, if he should ever get her there. His spirit revolted at his position now and then, when he was able to think of himself at all. Charles was a very child in the things of life, quite unused to hardship, to the neighborhood of suffering, or to feeling its claims upon him. He could only attempt the most elementary consolation to the sick girl he guarded, addressing her kindly but timidly, as a well-nurtured child would speak.

He had admitted once for all, in this kind of business, the superiority of Jones. He had had to admit it, since Jones, for all his persistent anxiety and genuine suffering,—for his foot was much swollen, and had been ill-tended, so Charles heard,—was swimming in his native waters, and Charles was a fish most miserably out of his. Charles had always left such things to other people, carefully. He had never, as he would have said, felt such a fool,—so useless,—as during the first hour of his arrival at Jones' small hotel in the Madeleine quarter. He had

but four hours there all told,—from five to nine,—but it was enough to realize his rashness, completely. He had not gathered, from his hasty reading of Jones' cautious phrases in the letter, composed for Violet's eye, what the girl's state of cerebral excitement and bodily exhaustion was, in fact. Further, he was so patently, in the eyes of both Lisette and Marmaduke, not the person who was required. It was so patent who was. Charles was immediately on the defensive before both, to explain the step which had seemed natural, and rather creditable, in England. Nor was it of any use explaining to Lisette.

"Where's Violet?" said Lisette, having embraced Charles in an amicable manner, and clinging instantly to his arm. She remembered him, as was evident, and linked him to her cousin in her mind. And, so questioned and clung to, Charles must confess, with that lovely mask of fear before him, that Violet was not there.

"Didn't she hear?" said Lisette, only half attending, heedless, it seemed, of the words he used. "Why didn't she come, if she knew? Duke said he would tell her."

Charles glanced across the room for assistance. He had already explained to Jones what was necessary, and Jones, a decent little fellow, had accepted it without too great an insistence on details.

"He did tell her," he explained to Lisette, "but she couldn't come. She isn't very well, you know,—it's the doctors."

"Ill?" said the girl. "That's a lie. You'd look at me if you meant it. Violet thinks me awful, I know. I told Duke she would. Who's right?" She looked across the room in turn, with her beautiful strange eyes. "She's gone in with the stodgy lot, Aunt and the rest. Violet hates me now."

"Good Lord!" Charles muttered, helpless. "Jones, can't you tackle her?"

Jones was ready.

"Come here, Lisette," he said, for he could not move

from his chair. He took her hands. "Look here, listen now. Mrs. Shovell——"

"Who's Mrs. Shovell?" said Lisette, her eyes not taking him in, though their light lay round him.

"Violet," said Jones, his eyes apologizing to Charles, while the color ran up his pale face, "your cousin. She is at home, waiting for you, quite ready. She has been wanting you all this time,—I told you about that, didn't I? Now she has sent her husband on, to let you know."

"Charles? That's Charles; she called him that. I call people by their names, quicker,—see? She wouldn't like it if she heard. Violet thinks a lot of him, I expect. He's gone on her awfully, anyhow,—bad as Edmond was on me. Edmond 'll be swearing now,—my goodness! But it was no good telling him, was it? I had to get away."

"You were bound to," Jones assented quietly. "The only honest thing."

"I'm honest, you think?" she said, handling him affectionately, as she had handled Charles.

"I think so,—yes."

"I'd had to have told 'Edmond," said Lisette. "Shouldn't I? And then,—my—God——" She ceased, biting her lip. "He was a good fellow," she said. "*Bon garçon*, that's what they say. Gave me things,—called me a lot of funny names. I understood the way he talked." She bit her lip again. "It's awful to have to choose."

"Awful," Jones agreed again. "But it's always happening, and it's got to be done. She, your cousin, had to choose. And she chose this way, of sending him for you, —because they wouldn't let her cross the sea."

"But she'll be on the other side," said Lisette. "At Dover. That's England, isn't it? Shall I see Violet at Dover?"

So it went on. She could be distracted for a time, by Marmaduke's expert efforts, but she always came

back to it,—the conviction that Violet should be there. Why, this good little man of hers, "Duke," had told her she was coming, in the manner Felicia believed. She did believe him, fully, when he spoke in a certain way. She did not believe this Shovell man at all. And she did not care for seeing either of them, really, had they known. Lisette was "sick" of men, utterly. She could get on for a time without them, even nice clean Englishmen like these. She wanted a hand to hold, an arm to cling to, such a light decided hand as that which had once caught her wrist back from the wine, at a crowded table, such an arm as she had grasped in the dark tunnel on the long train, and during those minutes at the station when, still intending to tease Violet by snatching the jewels, she had kissed her on the seat. It was those soft tones, remembered now in her need, she wanted. She was frightened,—anyone could see it,—equally scared of what lay behind, pressing upon her, and of the unknown inexorable she had still to face. She looked all ways, and found no outlet. It was worse than any tunnel,—since tunnels have an end.

"It's a woman she wants," murmured Jones, with his habit of saying the obvious; and Charles, by his gloomy silence, agreed. So far as man alone could be of use, Jones had been. Charles was amazed by his resources. The situation itself was unheard of, incredible, to Charles' young-University ideas. These two, the young man and the beautiful girl, barely mistress of herself, and quite dependent upon him, had been alone in a couple of rooms, constantly together in the closest intimacy, for a week or more. Yet she had no claim upon him at all. It was not even as if he knew her, by the social standards: Jones knew nothing of Lisette. He had put together a little, very cautiously, of her recent life in talking to her; but essentially (thought Charles) she was not his sort at all. She was essentially a girl of high breeding, lordly ancestry, ill-educated and ill-regulated, no doubt, but her

claims were there, showing constantly in her tones and her fine pale face. It was only at one point her sphere and Jones' could touch,—on the side of Jones' pity,—because Lisette needed, and he could supply. Jones had supplied freely. He had supplied her with comforts, warmth, and food, not to mention friendliness, to dilute his more solid charity. He had found her a doctor, a doctor who took her condition with a lightness that had surprised him; who said that, though *fatiguée* and *enervée* for the time, she would be all right,—in the event. He had next proposed sending Lisette to certain kind ladies of his acquaintance in Paris; but she, learning that the ladies were French, and religious, would not. She grew so excited, especially on the subject of their religion, that Jones had to abandon the idea rather hastily, and fall back on his own wits again. He had bought her everything for her personal need, even clothes,—with the assistance of the obliging maid at the hotel. He had even supplied her with a position, according to his decorous little middle-class ideas.

He explained to Charles, when by chance it became necessary,—the chance of a servant addressing Lisette as Madame,—that she was staying that week at the hotel under the title of Jones' wife. This had been his first step on her arrival: such an obvious first step to the mind of Jones that he had not thought of mentioning it to Shovell until nearly the moment of the girl's departure. Charles himself was her brother, he added, come over to fetch her,—did Shovell mind?

Naturally, Charles had no objection when he turned his mind that way. It struck him, vaguely, the thing was in character,—just like Jones: might be tacked on to the ancient narrative, stored among honeymoon records in the back of his mind one of these days. To tell the people at a French hotel that this lovely little frantic creature was his sick wife, joining him by appointment,—and to fail to observe how they smiled! It was, or would

be, some time in the future, should Charles ever find himself, with mind at ease, at Violet's side again, an excellent joke against Jones.

For the moment it was a useful fiction enough, and served their turn. Charles was fair in his coloring, like Lisette, not to mention that all English types look alike to the French. He called her by her pet name easily now, having spoken of her so with Violet; and she called him Charles, when she used any name at all. At times she lost the connection with him, and seemed puzzled, until he reminded her by some reference to their common past,—so short a past after all,—merely those three days. When he touched the sleeve of what she was wearing once, and smiled at her his charming easy smile, connections seemed to adjust, and she smiled back with a spark of her original mischief.

"It's hers," said Felicia softly. "Oh, weren't you in a temper about it, too! I've worn it a lot since then. Somebody—Gaston—put it in his picture. He didn't get the shadows right though, I told him. They all said it suited me, in the *ateliers*."

She threw in a scrap of history like this from time to time, gradually propping their conjectures. They dared not question her about it. Charles was calm.

"It doesn't suit you," he asserted, "not so well as her. I like her best in it."

Whereat Lisette laughed sweetly—and Charles would have liked to cry. He was very soft-hearted, and the look of her, certain gestures and turns of phrase, dragged him back into the past,—the evening when he had been rude to her, and she had played with the pearls. She had been such a baby,—a naughty baby,—lying across that chair. Her face now, when she was not thinking, had the untroubled lines of childhood still,—any man would have said, unscathed. It was incredible,—unthinkable,—and so Charles struggled not to think.

II

"I suppose she got among a painting lot, then, did she?" said Charles to Jones, just for the relief of ordinary speech between man and man, when they had made the girl rest a little before her journey. All was ready, for she had very few things to prepare. "I say, it's rather odd none of us thought of that."

"Cuckoos, weren't we?" said Jones. "She must have been there quite a time, and anybody might have heard of her. It's quite a small quarter that covers the studios, really. They must have been painting her night and day, to judge by things she's let fall, now and again. I can't make out all of it,—don't suppose anyone ever will. She forgets herself so quick you see."

"That's luck for her," said Charles, "I should think."

Jones agreed. "The worst came at the start," he said, "no doubt of that. She tries not to talk of it, but when she tumbles on it by mistake—well, you should see her face. That's the man,—beast!—she can't stand him. He must have been a fair devil," said Jones, and his tone gave the word its full meaning.

"Is that the one she calls Edmond?"

"No, no. Edmond's the last,—the same she was seen with in the gallery. I fancy he got her clear away from the other,—settled it behind scenes, perhaps,—I hardly know. She was pretty well off with Edmond, by what she says. I'd like to get hold of that fellow," said Jones thoughtfully, "before I leave. I've an idea he's all right, somehow."

"I—say!" said Charles. "Look out!"

He meant he would not have done himself what Jones was calmly proposing. The sheer physical courage of this small and simple "man in the street" was what was coming home to Charles. For the sake of his notions of honor and fair play, he would undertake anything. He had an idea, now, that something was owing to this

second fellow of whom he spoke. "Edmond," for whose second name, which Lisette could not tell him, Jones had been searching lists of artists and art-collectors vigorously, had withdrawn the girl, it appeared, from the gypsy existence she was leading in the studios, lifted her right above it, into security and comfort, in the course of a single day. It was love at first sight, for Edmond, certainly, and for Lisette, it was sufficient liking, so that she hesitated not to jump on Edmond's cushion, when advanced.

Not that she had been exactly unhappy in the studio phase, Jones gathered; only constantly uncertain, tormented by dread of the black phantom behind of the man from whose clutches she had fled, *éperdue*, at the first opportunity. It was he, that "first," who had put the fear upon her originally, from the backwash of which her reason was almost shaken now. Him she had come to dread with the exaggeration of nightmare, the nightmare her letters had suggested. Her face, when his shadow fell across the dialogue, said Jones, was—well, Charles had seen. Charles had once, and bit his lip.

"She'd have killed him, if she'd had a chance," said Marmaduke, in his calm and commonplace tone. "I'm pretty sure of that. Except for consequences to herself, I wish she had."

Charles rose to his feet restlessly; he could not sit still when people talked like that. It was hardly decent. He turned Jones' attention to the other part again, the transition period in the *ateliers*, which at least had a semblance of comedy, on the surface. Lisette, it appeared, talked of a whole gang of young artists in a pleasant and sisterly fashion by their first names, or nicknames, and talked of their doings not unwillingly. She had just drifted that way instinctively, by right of her birth and blood, finding friends and admirers among them immediately. It was really only returning to a former life, that of her childhood,—with differences, of course. She was "on her

own " in Paris, and had to " look out." She had " looked," Jones gathered, quite capably, with the curious aptitude of the Ingestres for holding her own amid the cross-claims and jealousies of the other sex. The blood of Lisette's ancestresses served her there. They would do anything for her, she gaily said, and Jones did not doubt it. She had been dumb when she arrived among them, blankly uncomprehending the language spoken about her, but—these two men easily imagined—that must only have added to her unearthly charm. She had doubtless made a sensation in the studios, not by her beauty alone. She had talked by means of her pencil, and retaliation was ready instantly for those who libeled her; for her humor and decision of touch in caricature was one of her most marked endowments. Masters and students alike roared with laughter at her productions, and her proceedings,—her friendly demeanor, and comical efforts to talk. She must have been an unequaled toy, indeed. Funny, naughty, and pretty,—all the little nursery words which translate quite aptly into French, were the birthright of Lisette. They used her pet name, too; it amused them,—and made sonnets and songs for her. She admitted herself she had had fun with the " boys,"—laughed and wrinkled up her nose when she alluded to parts of it. All told, it was " not bad,"—but the fear was always there. Her enemy had found her once, in London, and might find her again. She lived in a bubble that might burst from day to day.

Only with " Edmond," in quite another rank of life, she had for a time escaped that fear; but she had small respite, poor child. It was but a short interval before a worse came upon her, the complicated swarm of doubts and dreads that were tormenting her at the present time. For a week or two she had lived the ordinary bourgeois life with the art-collector. He was " gone on her," as she innocently repeated, utterly, and quite ready to marry her if she would. He would have refused her nothing,—it

was she who refused. She was drifting into a life that a thousand others live in peace and comfort in the capitals, in charge of a man who was kind to her, spoilt her even, and studied her every whim—when the bubble about her broke. She was cut off from Edmond, from the niche of rock on which his friendly arm had lodged her, and tossed a chip on the waves again: helpless, since the child would not be his, and she could not tell him. It was her enemy's child. Too proud to confess her shame,—for this was shame to her, this badge of a bondage she had not chosen,—too honest to live upon her benefactor longer than she must, in the circumstances, she could only turn, at bay, and seek with hunted eyes for any corner to hide in. At the point of utter despair, her eye had lighted upon Jones in the garden; she had teased him at the time, but a few days later found herself driven to apply to him, and surrendered.

"She'd never have come without," said the young man. "It's only a mercy I got the address through to her when I did. She's proud, I can tell you,—I've found that out these last days, anyhow. But there she was! If that's not being stranded, I'd like to know what is. With a face like that, in a state like that,—a girl alone! She couldn't earn even,—she earned as a model in the studios. I can't see what she could have done but what she did."

"It's ghastly," said Charles resentfully. He would far sooner not have talked of it, really,—Jones seemed to him unnecessarily frank; but he felt, for Violet's sake, he must know the facts. He very, very much wished Violet were there to listen instead of him.

So did Jones.

No one would have suspected the crushing blow Violet's absence was to Jones by his countenance, though, of course, ten times over in Shovell's hearing, he "quite understood." He had really been so sure she would come, even while, in duty bound, he drew up lists of likely things that might detain her; other claims such as a popular

young woman, at this spring season, in town, must have. He had composed his long letter,—the letter she had never seen,—with care, so as to disturb her as little as possible: touching lightly, in a set of concise business phrases, on the perfectly obvious steps he had taken, and their perfectly ordinary results,—just showing her the case, Lisette's and his, as simply and barely as possible, and proposing nothing. Heaven defend Jones from proposing, suggesting even, to such as she!

And straight upon the letter's departure he had pictured her coming,—one cannot chain one's fancy in these things. Wise arguments have nothing to do with it. She would come to that hotel she had herself recommended, "impetuous" as the spring breezes, sweet and sane as his own spirit had always found her, bright-eyed, swift of hand and foot, all her quick wits strung to their need, dressed, of course, in a feathered hat and furs, ready to direct their willing efforts, to console and comfort his charge. She might even have touched his swollen ankle in passing, and given him a word of pity and a laughing glance; it would be so like her to do so, that it slipped in among his other conjectures, unaware. All that foresight and common sense alone could do, Jones had done, he believed. The police, the hotel folk, the station folk were warned,—every prudent precaution had been taken. But it was not enough. The best that poor mankind could do, racking his brain during feverish nights of pain, was not sufficient. Another thing was wanted, the first best influence in Jones' world, the woman,—as he said.

Lisette kissed Jones at parting. It hardly struck Charles as singular, since that was the way, for the moment, she treated all the world. She coaxed them with eyes and lips to be gentle with her, and clung simultaneously with one hand. She would do it to the railway-conductor, very probably, thought Charles, unable to smile at his own fancy; and, as probably, the conductor would understand, pity, and adore her when she did. She scattered

pity and adoration about her as she went, Lisette. She had always done so, to sensitive hearts: that was her "upsetting" quality. And if she had been "upsetting" in her virginal carelessness, how much more now! She was intolerable.

She called Jones "Duke," as Charles had noticed already. Now Jones himself must have suggested that, because no feather-headed girl like Lisette could have guessed, unaided, what Jones' mother's name for her son had been. She must have been helped by a suggestion,—it seemed also by a jest.

"He said he'd make me a duchess, for this week," said Lisette to Charles. "I've married him,—see? That's his idea,—I didn't care. I talked once to a duchess with a thin nose, but I didn't think much of her. She didn't care for me either," said Lisette reflectively. "Do you think I'm like a duchess?" she appealed to Charles.

"Not the least," he said with fervor. "Any more than a Lady Alicia; Jones remembers that."

Lisette laughed, her pretty vacant laugh, and looked down at "Duke," her latest guardian. "I like him better now," she observed, just to encourage Jones.

Lisette was still sure "Duke" was in love with her,—she had picked up that conviction just where she left it, her mind being constructed, in the matter of convictions, like her cousin Eveleen's. In virtue of that conviction, Jones' behavior during this peculiar week had been exquisitely entertaining, had he known. It was a pity that Lisette, for various reasons, had been quite unable to enjoy the really enormous joke he was. There was faint drollery in her expression as she gazed downward now, but there was more kindness.

"*Bon garçon*, that's what he is," said Lisette, with a little wrinkle of her nose to tease him. "That means a good old sort. He's treated me like a duchess, anyhow. I hope that'll soon be well."

She patted the wounded foot,—genuine grace and grat-

itude in the passing tone and gesture. A duchess could not have done it more prettily, distracted by her multifarious miseries as she was. Even Jones could not have doubted Lisette was a "lady" at such minutes,—something of a great lady too.

"I tied it up for him," she remarked to Charles, "better than the doctor. That doctor was a fool, couldn't make him comfortable, could he? Poor Duke."

"She would make a capital nurse," said Jones. "She's got the hands." He was holding one of the hands in his, quietly; it was white and soft as ever, for all she had passed through.

"I can do lots of things," said Lisette with conviction. "I only didn't at home, because of Aunt. Aunt supposed I wouldn't, so I didn't,—see? People must ask for what they want." Having laughed, she bit her lip. "I'm not going there," she said suddenly, with a flash of almost panic doubt. "That's not where I'm going?"

"No, no," said Jones. "You know we promised, not your aunt."

"I'm going to Violet," observed Lisette. "To her house."

"That's it," said Charles, to whom she appealed. He consoled himself with the thought that it was true. It was to Violet's house, and to the father's arms that had once protected her, that this poor little homeless "duchess" was bound. He did not deceive her utterly when he stated it.

All the same, the journey was awful.

It was not a night, to begin with, that a strong man would have chosen to cross the sea. It was wild, with floods of furious rain against the glass of their carriage, as they traversed Paris from west to east, along the glittering boulevards at which the girl hardly glanced. Charles looked out mechanically, for Paris was new to him, and it was amazing to find himself there, for this

flash of time, and on such business. He had no wish but to escape as soon as possible, and, though he gazed at the shifting brilliance of the streets, no impression remained upon his mind.

The crowd at the station, largely men, since the local trains were filling, was a nightmare to Lisette. She had come to fear the sharp Parisian voices, and dark faces, even those that looked at her kindly; and many did. The fair young Englishman, with his beautiful, too obviously *souffrante* wife, was equally envied and compassionated, on all hands. The task,—to take her traveling in that state! The *corvée*! Heaven guard those Frenchmen from such a night's disquiet as that would be, for example! Only sheer necessity, some frightful news, must urge it, so they told themselves. Perhaps the illness of a child,—another child,—at home. Yet, one and all, and in spite of everything, they envied Charles Lisette.

One man, a small one, recognized her. She saw it, and clung frantically to her escort's arm.

"The other," suggested Charles, with an easy smile. "Take the other side, do you mind? I want the right arm free."

But the little man did not approach, nor venture near to the freed right arm. He was too naturally modest to do so, and contented himself with a single weasel-smile at Lisette, disagreeable in itself, but unproductive. He evaporated in the press about them, and they entered the train without interference offered or the faintest offense. It was only the effect of the *rencontre* on the girl was unfortunate. Her beautiful eyes searched the crowd till the moment of starting, in perpetual apprehension, above a bitten lip. Then she subsided, still uncertain, on the cushions, and looked at Charles.

"You're better than Duke," she remarked to him. "Gaston smashed him easy, that day by the pond."

"Was that the one that bowled Jones over?" asked Charles.

"That?" She nodded backward. "Oh, no. He's a bit of dirt—that's what they called him anyhow. Gaston was better, a bigger man. I wasn't there when it happened, you know; but I heard."

That was about the last piece of personal evidence Charles, or indeed any other, extracted from Lisette. In the present confusion of her thoughts, these random memories were dragged from her, but her whole desire was against looking backward, England her one vague hope of peace; and the entire French episode was blurred on her mind, as unreal as a dream that is past, after the illness towards which her fate was sweeping her now, as surely as the train was sweeping, in that dear direction, towards the coast.

The passage was bad. Lisette was ill, and Charles was terrified. What man would not have been, with such small experience of life and suffering to help him? The women in the cabin were kind to Lisette, but they shook their heads.

"You're being met, I suppose?" said one of them to Charles, and, at his negative, looked faintly impatient and contemptuous of such arrangements, as though they regarded him as a schoolboy rather than as a full-grown man. Charles began to think it would be months before he could successfully build up the dignity of his sex again. Even Lisette seemed a little sorry for him when the nature of things allowed it. Her pluck, even *in extremis*, amazed him, throughout the night.

"I shall be all right," she told him, collapsed completely on her upper berth in the hot and crowded cabin, looking like a corpse, blue-lipped and pallid under the tangle of her pale gold hair. "I've no head. I always got giddy at dances—told 'em so—Honorina never believed it—thought I did it to get into corners with 'em—but fact! Couldn't let Father swing me even—saw for himself he'd better not. I shall be—this way—all the way to London, very likely. Lord, you needn't be scared by this!" And

curling up again, away from him, she buried her fair head in her arms.

But Charles was scared,—horribly, and he had the leisure to be. The boat was late, delayed getting into port by the terrible seas, and the light was coming as they neared the English shore. Charles, gray with sheer anxiety in the morning light,—for he was an excellent sailor and, but for Lisette, might have enjoyed the adventure,—began to see nothing for it but to stop at Dover and wire his father-in-law to come down to their assistance. It looked poor-spirited, but he was long past considering appearances. It seemed the only course of safety, the only way to avoid all risks. For his trouble was the usual one, of course: that among so many, he knew not which risks to take. Women are more used to this choice in life.

It was not required. All risks had been taken, for Lisette, in advance. The face he loved best, dreamed of at intervals all through that wretched night, was on the salt-swept quay to welcome them, when the belated boat came in. As he strode off the vessel of his torment on to solid English soil, he saw her suddenly, in the mingled lights of night and day. Selfish relief first, and then fury as selfish, swept across Charles' face.

"Violet! How dare you?" he gasped. He seized and shook her, the clash of feelings was so extraordinary. Such a night as he had passed brings the elemental man to the surface, or rather, leaves it bare. "How dare you think of it? How did you hear?—Oh, Lord, darling, I'm thankful. I've had the devil of a time."

"Is she here?" said Violet, her gray eyes, under a gray veil, searching the press behind him.

"She's here all right, but awfully ill. That woman's bringing her off,—a decent sort. Here,—stand still. No one's looking. Curse the veil!"

Rough with her almost, in his rage and joy, he tried to snatch a kiss, there on the open quay; but owing to

the veil he execrated, or her own elf-like faculty, she eluded him, and he only reached her cold rainy cheek. She shrank away, slipped through his fingers,—it was as though, for the moment, she was not his.

“I’ll give it you for this when we get home,” he muttered, still holding her to him forcibly.

“So will Father,” said Violet. “I’m in for it, all round. All right, goose,” she answered all his questions, still looking beyond him with steadfast eyes. “Go and be useful, will you? Joliffe’s there. Tell him which things to take, no time to lose. We have lost enough,—needn’t have hurried so.” Then her face changed, as it had not for Charles. “Lisette! Darling, what is it? Won’t you look at me? I have been waiting such a time.”

“I—I saw you,” observed Lisette with curious tranquillity, lifting her strange eyes to Violet, as she gripped her arm. “He needn’t think I didn’t see him, because I did. Violet,—will you give——”

“Look out, sir!” said Joliffe, sharply, behind Charles. “Not Miss Violet,—the other——”

Charles, reckless of all beside, caught Violet, and held her up against a strain that was making her stagger where she stood. “The other” Joliffe and another man just failed to catch; for Lisette slid, with soft obstinacy, between them, and fainted full-length on the slippery quay, almost dragging her cousin, to say nothing of her cousin’s husband, down with her in her fall.

III

Jones had gone back, still limping a little, to his home near Leatherhead, in Surrey, his work being done. His housekeeper there was glad to see Mr. Jones back at last, something like permanent, and Jones assured her that he had had enough of foreign places for the present. The curate was glad to see him too, for without Jones, in the small village where fate had placed him, the curate was

bored. Jones and the curate, both having a passion for physical culture, and very little natural physique to work upon, were friends. There is no common pursuit, perhaps, which binds men more than this, as was proved in the case; for Jones and the curate, in the matter of religious dogma and practice, did not at all agree. But they let those differences slide, being the only two young men of education in the village, and played tennis and golf together, plodded the lanes side by side on Sunday afternoons, or, if the curate could be urged to such frivolity, discovered a world beyond Surrey, in Jones' car.

The curate was inclined to think that Jones should sell all that he had,—i. e. the motor,—and follow himself and the nearest path of charity by presenting the village with a public room. Jones said he would think it over, but he had not proceeded to action yet, because he was convinced, owing to the curate's dramatic propensities, the room when presented would be used for theatrical entertainments, and of those he could not in his heart approve. He was, however, fighting clear of his father's prejudices by degrees; and the curate had some hope that his sojourn in Paris had put the finishing touch to the process, and that the room might yet be his. He prayed for this happy consummation sedulously. When pressed, Jones even confessed that he had attended "something resembling" theatrical entertainments in the French capital: only,—fortunately for his understanding with the curate,—he did not go into detail.

The curate, naturally, wanted to know if her friends had found the unfortunate young woman; and Jones said yes, luckily her friends had. The curate said—too late, he supposed; and Jones said, well, that depended how you looked at it. The curate was rather silent on receipt of this response, and Jones had, for the sake of honesty and friendship, to trespass a little further on Miss Lisette's private affairs, and explain himself to Mr. Freshwater. She was not married, he said, but he had

every reason to think she would be, quite soon ; and she was a kind and beautiful girl, and had been very hardly used. The curate, who was particular, would have accepted these rather incomplete explanations more unreservedly if the word " beautiful " had not occurred among them. However, if she was really to be married, that was so much to the good,—best thing under the circumstances. Jones, who was cleverer than the curate, and knew it, though he never disclosed his class at Oxford, said he was so glad Freshwater agreed with him. After that they left the subject, and talked with earnest brows of the cricketing prospects.

During the interlude while he resumed these healthy habits and rural activities, as need not be said, everybody for whom Jones had worked forgot him completely, always excepting one.

Charles Shovell, acting under orders, sent him a line from his publishing office, which missed Jones in Paris, and followed him to Leatherhead after an interval. Charles had a particularly pretty fine hand, almost feminine, and for an instant Jones' heart leapt—but it was not so. That is, it was so, but not directly.

" DEAR JONES " [wrote Charles],

" I don't know if this will catch you,—I have rather let things slide. I ought to have let you know sooner, but my wife's health has been causing some anxiety. She met us at Dover with the doctor's car, so that was all right, and we got the girl home between us by degrees. She (L. not V.) was pea-green at the port, and I never thought we should get beyond it ; but my wife got some brandy down,—about a quarter of a pint before she had finished,—and Lisette was cheeking us again before we got to Canterbury. Brandy seems to suit her nicely,—she was awfully pleased to have a drive, as she called it, and seemed to be on terms with the chauffeur. Glad to say he sat on her,—nobody else could. At Canterbury we

got breakfast,—Violet had wired a Dean in advance,—said he was a friend of her uncle's and an early riser, just her style,—and Lisette drank his Reverence's coffee as if she had been born to it, sitting in his Reverence's chair. Mashed the old boy awfully too, but that's by the way. I warned V. to keep an eye on the spoons, L. seemed to like the look of them. However, we got off safely without her even asking him for one as a keepsake. She is safe now in the hands of her relations in Harley Street, and Dr. Ashwin says after a rest she will be none the worse. None the worse!—they must be a hard breed. I was pretty well done for myself, I can tell you, by the time we got the little monkey off our hands.

“I am told to make Violet's apologies, but I prefer to make my own. She would have replied to yours, if she had ever read it. I did what I thought best, anyhow, it was hard enough to do. Now she is cut off writing, but I am to express her very particular thanks, in her name and that of her mother's family, for all you have done for Miss Addenbroke. Yours, she says, is the only faultless performance; everybody else has muckered it somehow. (Last expression not hers, but I translate.) We hope to see you at home when things go better; at present nobody dares stir a finger to excite her further, that's the fact. Excuse haste, dashed busy,—

“Yours sincerely,

“CHARLES SHOVELL.”

A lively, friendly, forthcoming letter, and like the writer, Jones must admit. For all the anxiety into which it plunged him, he was thankful to have it. He pored over it often, picturing every stage of that Canterbury pilgrimage of theirs, pondering Charles' careless phrases, reading between the lines. She was not “pea-green” at the port, possibly, but she had been white enough when Jones had last seen her, weeks since, to cause him a passing pang. Lisette had “cheeked” her, doubtless,—he

had memories of how she had done it in the train,—taunted her,—tired her too. Shovell was “done for” at the end of the journey, was he? Well, what of her?

Of Lisette, the center of his best efforts for so long, no further news for weeks. Then he was remembered in the other house by the only person likely to remember him, since, according to Marmaduke’s experience, it is invariably the busiest people who make time for the smaller kindnesses. He was honored by an autograph scrawl from the doctor, directed to him under his old title as secretary of the S.P.X.Z., and forwarded from that society’s office, by his successor, Brown.

“DEAR SIR,

“My daughter pronounced your name last night, and it recalled to me a neglected obligation. You have every claim to be kept on a level with our news, after your remarkable devotion in Felicia’s cause. She gave birth on Thursday morning to a healthy son, and conditions are smiling for both. She is recovering fast, impatient to see you and exhibit the child, but I stipulate for a week’s rest. Thereafter we shall be delighted, and if you will name an hour, I will try to fall in with it. But I am much tied for the moment, so in case of absence, Ford, who says he knows you, has kindly undertaken to represent me. Please believe, however, that I am anxious to congratulate you in person on a distinguished piece of work, amply justified by results, as you will see.

“Yours very truly,

“CLAUDE C. ASHWIN.”

Again, just what Jones would have expected of the writer: generous and gracious and clear,—remarkably clear concerning Lisette. His face glowed as he deciphered it, for Jones was a born hero-worshiper, and he knew more about this particular man, on a side he did not display much to the world, than the bulk of the

doctor's fashionable connection knew. This was a recognition of his pains worth having, worth preserving all his life. It was noteworthy too, in its resemblance to another message, only that said a "faultless performance," and this a "distinguished piece of work." The expressions alike surprised Jones, who had not been conscious of aiming at artistic finish in what he undertook, having merely "stuck to it," in his phrase. But father and daughter evidently suspected him of native art rather than native obstinacy. Jones might have been an actor fresh from a triumph in a new part, to judge by the form of their compliments. It amused him, just as Mrs. Shovell had often amused him before, by a fresh unlikeness to all his own gray-clad ideals; and he continued to turn over these ornamental Ashwin formulas for some time in his mind before he returned to a more painful investigation.

She had "pronounced" his name, by night.

That was the phrase that struck his heart in passing it. Why did those words, in a doctor's hand, suggest at once the demon-grip of fever, the utterance that is unconscious and uncontrolled? Why was the writer "much tied" for the moment? Tied by what?—to whom? Why, knowing, as he surely must, that Jones was acquainted with his daughter, did he offer nothing, no definite reassurance as to her state,—only Felicia's? Was it not clearly because he could not, because he was himself under the stress of an anxiety like Jones',—yet more crushing, perhaps, since she was his only child?

They would tell him, Marmaduke supposed, if she died; that was all. It was all such a stranger to the family could expect. But it was wearing suspense waiting that prescribed week to go to Harley Street and learn the worst. To the other house, the little house in the west where she lay, he did not even think of going, he dared not approach it, pass its sacred gate. He was guilty of flat moral cowardice in the matter. His eye

skipped the first column of the morning paper, and passed to dwell on the prospects of cricket, vacantly. The curate saw that something was wrong, when Jones excused himself from tennis, asked him to tea instead, very kindly, and tried, as is the habit of black cloth, to extract by soothing and subtle methods his subject of preoccupation. He heard that a "friend,"—not a "fellow" for once,—was dangerously ill, no more. Jones' housekeeper extracted that it was the wife of a friend, the young wife,—and thought it "like his kind heart" to take such an interest.

Several times he asked his conscience, fearfully rather, but never guiltily, what had come to him that this girl, casually met and barely known, should, beyond all others, so possess his thoughts. It was the manner in which he had encountered her, he supposed; the way in which, owing to the chance of Miss Lisette, their eyes and hands had joined as fellow-workers over her case. Marmaduke had never worked with a woman before; it had barely occurred to him that young man and woman could work in this way. It was the novelty and natural charm of such co-operation, doubtless, that had struck the impression so deep.

And then—her situation: it could not be, evidently, having crossed her path at such a period, that he was uninfluenced by that. She was a light, a torch to the dull heart of man, or woman either, such days as that when she had been drunk with the sun and the salt breezes on the beach. To the warmth of his own compassion for her cousin, which her generous compassion had stirred, she had added a glow from her own happiness by the way. Jones, during that memorable journey when his pity had first aroused, had felt the glow strongest in him while she slept, abandoned to her husband's arm. Was that not clear proof of the nature of her influence upon

him? What should it be but the life-giving, life-restoring ray from the hearth, the family, well-recognized as an inspiration in life or art? Which a sensitive heart retains,—like one of those little Rembrandt pictures over which Jones had pored in the palace of the Louvre,—the central facts of love transfigured, when all detail, local or topical, has been blackened out by time.

Jones, most modest about his own experience, had told himself several times that in that unknown garden of girls, London society, there were probably,—well, possibly,—plenty of others like her; like Mrs. Shovell, for he carefully substituted the name for the familiar pronoun in his thoughts, as he had done in his letter to Charles, with the instinct of personal propriety and cleanliness which was Jones,—which constituted his individuality so far as he possessed one. He loved her quaint, soft-syllabled name; it suited her, he considered, better than the man from whom she had borrowed it. He had not forgotten how she had first pronounced it to him, just to make things easier at table d'hôte, when it became clear some name was needed,—blushing in that imperceptible rose-leaf manner of hers, as though it were still strange to her lips, and she were shy of publishing her title to it, in the face of a heartless world. Further, and above all, to Jones' type of mind, that name that was another's enthroned her, set her apart, out of reach of degrading or covetous suggestions. Perhaps by virtue of the double moon of bliss when he had been privileged to know her, in all his images and recollections, Charles was there, just beyond, her safeguard; even though, in the stress of involuntary comparison (which Marmaduke endeavored to suppress), Charles should drop to the position of a mere appendage, a pleasing ornament,—though he should be no more than the gold band on her finger, or one of the glimmering, glinting things that encircled her neck, rose or fell upon her breast, those enchanted summer evenings when Marmaduke still had her near.

It is not credible, it will be contended, that a man should reach this state and not be conscious that he was a prey to the old passion, so over-written and over-sung that its naked apparition is disconcerting, all but unhinging, to the virgin mind. It is by its terror love is known, and it was by that terror, undoubtedly of his sentiments, that our hero should have known it. But note, that just when the urgent thing began to stir him first, to push among his tranquil array of daily feelings, another impulse of his being, almost equally strong, and much more familiar, had begun to threaten convulsion too. Marmaduke had been unable to confuse his love and his compassion,—love human and divine. During that long railway journey, which had been emotion's battlefield, the first feeling had ministered to the second so rapidly, so naturally, that it was easy to think, looking back, he had been urged throughout his quest by the passion of pity alone.

The test came now, when Lisette was safe, triumphant, protected,—when charity, satisfied, fell back a little, and compassion could be put away. Small wonder that, in the new resulting tumult on the inner field of his emotion, Jones should be amazed, perturbed,—though still unconvicted by conscience,—over what remained!

IV

He went to London by a carefully chosen train, timed respectably between four and five o'clock on a chilly afternoon of early May. He had brought the morning paper with him, one which he had not read; for Jones had a conscience as regarded newspaper reading; even though its result should merely be to disqualify a Government party's whole policy as "rotten," it seemed to him worth while. He took the "Times," and shared it with the curate, who showed a persistent preference for his parochial journal and local gossip, which daily application of the larger periodical was, according to Jones' reckon-

ing, eventually to cure. It had not yet cured it, but it might in time.

The paper he held was the Saturday's,—the day being Monday, since the Saturday issue contained a correspondence of interest, which he had missed. He did not read it for long, he watched the fields. Then, when the fields became hatefully overgrown by a fungus-brood of advertisements, when raw-colored factories, and the rows of unworthy plastered dwellings which are London's claws began to seize the country from his eyes, he took his paper up mechanically, glanced down,—and caught her name on the first page.

With a thrill such as he had never experienced or imagined, he recognized it was in the first division of small announcements, not the third he had so feared. "Shovell, on the fourth inst., the wife of Charles——" That was three days since, he thought mechanically, —Friday; Shovell's child was three days old. And he might have been relieved for the same period had he followed the announcements steadily! His cowardice served him right.

All well!—Jones woke to life again. He could carry her in his protecting thoughts, right across the horror of suffering and uncertainty, of which he had not dared to think, into a new world of happiness, more exquisite than honeymoon idling even,—the very best of all. Jones, dowered fatally with a soft heart, all but cried from sheer relief as he thought of it, she and her son,—or daughter was it?—son. Shovell, he thought, would have preferred a daughter,—Jones would have done so in Shovell's place, that is. But women had an amiable weakness for the masculine, and he allowed her that weakness, smiling to himself. He did not allow her many, but, since it granted her a desire,—that.

He must congratulate the family, he supposed. That was invariably done; and the chances were he should

see Lady Ashwin, since he was to see Lisette. That is, unless Lady Ashwin had altogether abandoned her young cousin, for her young daughter,—a desertion quite to be commended, on her part. It was a delightful choice for her, certainly: two infants, both charming probably,—all women care for that. Jones had some curiosity to see Violet's mother, though he confessed to shyness as well. Lady Ashwin had sounded so very magnificent and remote that evening he had conversed with her at the telephone. Since then he had heard little of her, except as having presented her daughter with the Ledger portrait, he remembered; and, by the same token, ought he not, in this happy consummation of everybody's affairs, to have brought that precious portrait back?

Then he wondered, having investigated that point of conscience, whether he ought not to postpone his call altogether. He had warned Ford, the secretary, by a card, that he meant to come; he had thought that precaution best, since, with a young mother, one cannot be sure. Some people might have found it strange that the young mother should summon him at all,—but that was just Lisette. Nobody knowing Lisette at all would be the least astonished; even Sir Claude's reference had suggested a humorous and indulgent view, half paternal, such as none in Lisette's neighborhood, not even a great doctor, could resist. She had probably clamored for "Duke" instantly, on the child's arrival, to come and see how well she had done it, and what a nice baby it was; and the doctor had been severe with her, dry like his daughter, rather cutting,—his eyes laughing, like his daughter's, all the time.

Jones' imagination, as may be judged by the specimens, was rampant; but that was excitement merely. He had to go on to Harley Street, he could not keep away. Besides, he must inquire. That, like the congratulating, was always done. It may be readily deduced, from these innocent reflections offered in succession to the patient

reader, that such events as the present one had not often entered upon the stage of Marmaduke's life. He was, indeed, working on a single precedent, the memory of his cousin's wife's first child. It was a good precedent, both gratifying and amusing to reflect upon, because Jones had been sponsor to the little girl, and still sent her toys at intervals. He remembered all about it very well; and how particularly ugly the small baby had been, and how hysterically pleased the mother had seemed about it. He quite imagined Mrs. Shovell would be more sensible, though perhaps a little surprising in her phraseology on the subject. But then, as her baby would be beautiful,—white,—as white as her own white pearls, or the lovely little neck they guarded—Jones stopped thinking there, and returned to Lisette. It was easy for a bystander to rhapsodize on Lisette, who was also beautiful,—fair as the day.

A young fellow with a pleasant though rather expressionless countenance,—footman probably,—told Jones at the door of the grand house that Sir Claude Ashwin was not at home. Whereupon Jones, distinctly relieved, inquired modestly for Mr. Ford.

"Mr. Jones, sir?" returned the expressionless young man. "Yes, sir. Mr. Ford's engaged for the present, sir,—hopes soon to be free. Very happy to see you, sir,—but would you care to see Lady Ashwin first?"

Jones would naturally care, since it was suggested so respectfully, to follow out the program offered him. On entering, it struck him the house had a business-like atmosphere. He heard voices through a baize door in the hall, where he waited for five minutes, while his escort went ahead to see if Lady Ashwin had changed her mind about graciously receiving Mr. Jones. That, at least, was the case in full, though Francis the footman, dexterous discretion personified, stopped short in stating the case at the word "see." The hall was well but con-

ventionally furnished, and, owing to the dim light, rather solemn. The men's voices Jones heard were discussing rapidly and keenly, though low, and he thought he recognized that of his unknown friend the secretary. "Business," once more, spread its grave atmosphere abroad; it was one Jones was accustomed to breathe, and approved.

But upstairs, things changed. Things underwent a miraculous transformation,—even on the stairs it began, for they were spaciouly designed, and softly carpeted. Business sank into the background, faded, vanished away. Jones tried to imagine Mrs. Shovell flying up these stairs, and just succeeded, but her spirit seemed strangely lacking in this luxurious quarter of the house. He followed Francis up more soft steps, along soft passages, to a door, which the footman opened, all his dexterity and discretion seeming to concentrate in the single action of turning the handle.

"Mr. Jones, my lady," said Francis, and let in Mr. Jones, all unprepared and in his ordinary clothes, upon the Golden Age.

Not that he called it that consciously, but the effect was the same upon his mind. Everything, time and all, slid back into a simpler, sunnier period. It was merely two beautiful women, and the child of one,—but they were all Ingestres, to the smallest, and so the ensemble they made touched perfection. Nothing—unless Titian endeavoring to be devout, and in a purely pagan revel of rich color, failing utterly—could have rendered the group worthily to an admiring world. St. Anne and the Maid-mother, according to Titian, might have equaled it; and since no devotion would have been expressed, there can be no offense in the comparison.

The setting was beautiful, to begin with: it was quite the most charming and comfortable room Jones had ever seen; even Mrs. Shovell's drawing-room, hitherto his ideal, paled before it. He had no idea how the effect was worked, not being either an artist or an upholsterer,

—but the general background tone was blue. Blue was Eveleen's color, a certain thick cloud-blue, not Violet's clear tint of the twilight sky; and her color grew into her surroundings, as into her dress, with no conscious determination on her part. As a fact, Claude had dressed this room for her, "ages" since,—Eveleen reckoned all time by "ages,"—and she had only improved, refurbished, and added to it. She had filched most of her paintings from Claude's collection,—he had snatched back one or two,—but as water-color painting was one of the few tastes they had in common the warfare had been agreeable. Some of the best remained with Eveleen, since Claude himself admitted they suited the room. There were a few flowers, the flowers of summer or summer lands without exception, though conditions were still wintry out-of-doors. A mass of white roses in a glass stood near Lisette. There were a few portraits, miniatures, and photographs. Jones, with his commonplace middle-class instincts, was a little surprised that neither husband nor daughter figured, so far as a discreet eye could discover, among the family represented. But, however regrettable this omission, there was certainly a large proportion of handsome people.

The Ledger miniature was not there,—but then, Ledger's model was, and nobody would have had eyes to spare for a portrait. Yet, glorified as she was in beauty, the first thing that struck Marmaduke in Felicia was that she was different. Something, some essence in her, had altered. It was inexplicable, like the beauty of the room. One more ready in expression would have said that Lisette had materialized,—with no depreciatory significance. She was certainly as real now as she was lovely, full to the brim of rapture, life and wickedness. She teased Jones instantly on his apparition, even in introducing him to her cousin, drawing him into the family group by tone and pretty gesture, though she did not stir. Her free treatment of Lady Ashwin really paralyzed

the visitor who looked on at it; but, oddly enough, Lady Ashwin seemed to like it, or at least, showed no signs of disapproving. She lay in a low chair, her head sidelong upon a velvet cushion, idly watching mother and child. She was dressed in loose draperies, as was Lisette; with sleeves that slipped above the elbow at every movement, leaving their beautiful arms bare. They were both in varieties of white, into the infinite details of which Jones dared not enter, except to mark that Lisette's was thin white, her rosy tints glowing through, and Lady Ashwin's was thick, as became maturity. But, mature or no, she was so elegant in form, and untroubled of aspect, as to astound Jones, who would certainly never have conceived her, at sight, a grandmother. Indeed he could, while he watched her in shy flashes, in the intervals of Lisette's demands upon him, have laughed at the idea.

They both, though pleased to see Jones, as they assured him, had an agreeable manner of ignoring his presence, in what they said. He felt very much like the spectator of some scene almost too intimate and too exquisite to be watched. It was only, it seemed, that they were both very happy, perfectly contented and amused, and were not inclined to put themselves out to entertain the visitor, since all life was such a liberal entertainment.

Lisette was amused by the baby,—immensely. She was, when she could spare a minute from this overmastering and novel diversion, passingly amused by Jones. She was perfectly at ease, displaying herself and her infant before him, and glanced at him in a friendly and confidential way from time to time. "Don't you wish he was yours?" said Lisette's look, and Jones very nearly did.

Eveleen was amused by Lisette,—vastly; and by the shameless way in which, armed with her baby and her beauty, she faced the outraged world. There was no further question now about the other parent,—that question had vanished. This baby was Lisette's. He was her

business only, nobody else need interfere, since she knew all about it. She knew better than her cousin, contemptuously; indeed, Eveleen's criticisms were a little vague. She knew so much better than the nurse, that the nurse gave notice, instantly, and was not replaced. She knew a good deal better than Sir Claude, telling him with condescension what to think about various little matters; and Claude accepted most of her suggestions, since she was so astonishingly well, obviously, as to put all the common reckonings out. The baby was in her arms at this moment, competently held, and, as was evident, generously nourished. She made her little private grimaces downward, in the direction of its eager little hands and mouth.

"Going to grow up greedy, like me," she confided to Eveleen. "No hope for him." She gathered her son more closely to her breast.

"He's an Ingestre," said Eveleen, gazing at the child's fine limbs. "In twelve years,—perhaps fourteen,—I shall be sorry for you, Felicia. About then it will begin."

"It won't," said Lisette. "We'll see who's mistress, him or me." She wrinkled her nose with a little sniff, lying back in her low chair. "I'm glad he's a boy," she said. "I wouldn't have cared for a girl, no fun. Wouldn't you have liked a boy as well as Violet?"

"No," said Eveleen, examining the screen she held, "I should not. Instead of her, perhaps, but even so, I doubt it. It would have been more bother than the girl."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Lisette, with a laugh, glancing at Jones. "I expect the girl gave in to you a bit; she did to me. She tickles you up with the things she says, but her eyes are good-natured all the time,—aren't they?" She appealed beyond. "I like Violet's eyes," she informed Eveleen. "So does he,"—nodding to Jones,—"I asked him once."

"He couldn't have said he didn't, if you asked," said Lady Ashwin.

"Oh, yes, he could," returned Lisette. "He's not that sort of man."

These calm contradictions were what amused Eveleen. The girl was quite unable to offend her, and suited her at all points singularly well. She had even regretted, several times, since Lisette appeared among them, that she had not taken the child Violet's suggestion originally, and had her in the house all this time. Only, to be sure, in that case, there would not have been a baby to complete the picture; and the general scandalous absurdity of the situation, which suited Eveleen's sardonic humor so perfectly, would have been wanting.

Jones, of course, had his opportunity, at this, the first introduction of Mrs. Shovell's name. The congratulation and the inquiry, both on his lips, would have been in place, could he only venture to speak them; but he felt shy. Something seemed vaguely to forbid the subject, or hold it at arm's length, even while they talked, using Violet's name. It puzzled him at first,—until Felicia herself enlightened him, and then he was only thankful he had not plunged too rashly.

"I am going to show him to Violet to-morrow," observed Lisette carelessly, when she had concluded her exhibition of the baby, in detail, to Jones. "She hasn't seen him yet,—not been well. Not ever since I gave her such a time of it in the carriage. Rank luck on her, isn't it? Now she'll be the last. Even you got in before her, little man. To-morrow she's coming, Cousin Eveleen said."

"I said, possibly," said Eveleen.

That was it, then! This girl-mother was still fragile, for all her looks; and the other mother, admirably careful, had not broken to her the news of her daughter's parallel case, which had doubtless caused more intimate anxiety. Lisette did not know of the existence, had not grasped the advent even, of the other child. Jones, watching Lady Ashwin's calmly-leveled eyes, was rather glad he

had not spoken, since the scheme was evidently hers. It was an escape; for it slipped into his mind that Lady Ashwin could, at need, become formidable. It was hard to say how he gathered it, from her perfectly tranquil attitude. He asked Lisette if Charles had seen the baby, and Lisette assented, making a face. A week since Charles had had a look at it in passing, and had proved himself quite unworthy of the privilege. He had seemed to think it like any other child. Jones smiled to himself, picturing Shovell's present expression, in a like situation. His mind kept traveling to the other and smaller house, since the ladies allowed him leisure for such excursions by their interludes of private talk.

"I shall have to go soon," the mistress of the house observed, as the small clock chimed above her; so saying, she settled a little lower in her chair. "If I go, that is; perhaps I won't."

"You said that before," said Lisette. "You'll go on saying it till Joliffe calls, and then none of us could stop you if we tried. You're a bit like Honoria in some things, putting it on. You're keen to get into that dress and your diamonds really."

"I am not, the least," said Lady Ashwin, quite childishly. "I'd sooner stop here."

Felicia ignored her, and looked at Jones. "You can stay with me when she goes to dress,—see? She'll go soon, 'cause she knows she's got to. It takes time, even with two of 'em at it. She's got a maid—French. She says I ought to have one too. Likely, isn't it? Likely I'd want a maid to tumble over,—bad as that nurse. Great Scott, that nurse! Didn't know where to look when I'd done with her, stuck-up thing. I say, Duke,—you're not going?"

Lady Ashwin, still with a nonchalant air, had risen in two stages, both very graceful, from her chair, and was regarding herself in the mirror over the fire-place, and patting her disordered hair with one white hand. Jones

rose too, half in respect, since when she was up he could not well remain seated; half with an idea of following her, at least for an instant, when she left the room, and so getting a chance to address her privately. He felt he must ask, hear something. They would hardly think him well-bred without. She surely could not be surprised that he should show that much interest in the daughter of the house, for all his supposed exclusive devotion to her cousin. But Eveleen discomposed his plans by not proceeding on her way to dress. On the contrary, she leant one arm on the mantelpiece and waited, looking towards Lisette.

"It's a swell house," said Lisette; "a duke's,—friend of yours." She wrinkled her charming nose at Jones. "She's got a dress like you never saw. I should say going a bit far, but she says that's the style. It's the stage is doing it, I saw that in Paris,—knocking out people's eye for color,—as if the stage could be like a room! Why, the flesh-tints are quite different in a room! I told her so, but she won't change it. Backs herself to carry it, you know."

"Nonsense," said Eveleen tranquilly.

"She wants to smash somebody to-night," said Lisette. "That's the fact,—we won't ask who. Your friend, perhaps,—if he isn't too old. Did you know she——"

At that point of Lisette's chatter, which was the kind of chatter Lady Ashwin understood and appreciated, Francis, the footman, reappeared.

He entered dexterously and discreetly, as before, but the mask of his impassive face had changed. There was human emotion in it, quite perceptible. It was a man who entered, to Jones' eye,—a rather apprehensive young man, endeavoring to remain a footman merely.

"Mr. Shovell, my lady," he said.

Eveleen did not shift her eyes from Lisette, though she left a pause, as usual.

"Very well,—bring him up," she replied.

"Mr. Shovell is downstairs, my lady,—would be glad to speak to you." Francis repeated a message, clearly. "He is sorry, but he's in a hurry. He is downstairs with Mr. Ford."

"I heard," said Eveleen. "I can't come down like this, can I?—I'm half-dressed. Ask Mr. Shovell to come here, if he wants me."

Francis hesitated, looked at Miss Addenbroke, and opened his mouth again; then, crushed by a glance from his mistress, departed. The trio in the room remained as they were, Lisette deeply engaged by the baby, which was just falling asleep in a fascinating manner; Eveleen rigid, her fine mouth slightly set. Jones, disconcerted by her obstinate pose, as though she occupied an entrenchment, and had no intention of abandoning it, had taken a seat again, though uncertainly.

Silence sank, the little clock ticking away Lady Ashwin's minutes, nothing stirring in the room. Then there were quick firm steps along the corridor, the rapid hand of business,—Jones recognized it—on the latch, and the secretary Ford entered in his turn. Jones guessed him easily, since it was a young man of Charles' sort, but not Charles. Marmaduke himself rose quietly and promptly to his feet again, for he knew trouble when he saw it if Lady Ashwin did not. He had scented it vaguely in the footman's aspect,—now it stood before them personified; and the Golden Age cracked about their heads. Sir Claude's secretary and he joined hands in mute recognition, though Ford's face did not relax. He was pale, and his lip bitten before he spoke.

"Shovell had to go, Lady Ashwin," he said. "He left word for you, that's all,—if I may ask you to come a minute." He held the door still open behind him with his hand.

"He might have come up," said Eveleen. Her hand gripped the mantel-shelf, quite visibly.

"He couldn't," said Ford. For an instant their eyes

crossed, and there was battle in both. "I was asked to make his apologies. Might I ask you to come out——?"

But no, Mr. Ford might not. Eveleen's whole attitude sullenly combated such pretensions. No mere secretary should presume to move her from where she stood.

"Is the child worse?" she said.

"Dying." Ford gave in, and his voice broke its guard.

"That's the message. Can't live through the night."

"Violet?" said a soft, vacant voice beyond. Lisette, clasping her baby, had turned her strange eyes upon the messenger.

"No,—no! Oh, tell her, Jones, for Lord's sake. I can't." The young man, suddenly overcome, swerved aside. "It shouldn't have been here, of course,—anywhere else," he muttered.

"The baby is dying," Jones interpreted, as Felicia turned her frightened eyes to him. "Your cousin has a little baby too, born three days ago. I think they didn't tell you."

"Three days?" The child, too tightly clasped, began to whimper. The mother was gasping slightly. "Does Violet—know?"

Hubert Ford's head was turned from them, bowed on his hand; but he shook it, and Jones interpreted.

"She doesn't know,—she is too ill, much too ill to be told anything."

"Dying?"

"No, no,—please God. Don't be frightened, my dear."

"How dare you frighten her?" said Eveleen sharply. "You had better go, all of you. There is no sense in coming to disturb her. If Violet has fussed that child to death, it is not her affair,—what did you say?"—to the secretary, who, without stirring from his pose, had spoken one word. He did not repeat it, and blank silence descended. But it seemed to echo on the silence,—shame!

"Why didn't the boy come up?" Lady Ashwin broke the silence, her fury,—a singular white fury,—mounting steadily. "He ought to have come straight, he knows it,—such nonsense!"

"He couldn't," Ford doggedly repeated.

"Couldn't come up the stairs?"

"No. . . . Shovell's dead beat. They only sent him round because nobody else could be spared."

"They needn't have troubled," said Eveleen. "I could have told them a week ago how it would be. Is Shovell vexed?"—a typical Ingestre query, put mechanically.

"Vexed? He's in agony,—will be till she is safe."

Another electric pause in this alarming dialogue. Lisette had collapsed backward, pallid, into her chair, attending to her child again with shaking little fingers. She looked ill, but nobody heeded her, not even Jones. Jones could hardly interview his own feelings, for sheer dread of something happening between these two. They had met, doubtless, on the question before, during the past week of strain. Eveleen's smile, at the last answer, would have hastened a crisis had Ford seen it, but he did not. The smile passed, and another expression took its place. Her tone was lowered too, when she spoke: less certain, by many degrees.

"Where's Claude?"

"With her. The fools have let him go to her at last."

"He wasn't attending her," said the doctor's wife. "They've all been wrangling, I suppose. Is Angus gone?" (That was the specialist, Jones learnt afterwards.) "Then he will not be back to-night,—Claude, I mean. Not to dinner, anyhow."

She seemed speaking for her own reassurance, rather than questioning him.

"Really, I can't tell you, Lady Ashwin," said young Ford, lifting his head, and turning towards her, as though at bay. "Shovell might have known. I did not examine him in detail, I admit it."

"Bah," said Eveleen, turning a little away, to escape the contempt of his eyes. "They never know anything about it, men like that. He didn't want to be asked, probably: that's why he turned tail." Ford, a man like Charles, was silent. "Francis,—are you still there?" Francis was, apparently, hovering just without the door, with a stricken face. "You needn't wait about like that," said his mistress. "I suppose Joliffe got my message. Has he come back?"

"Joliffe's there, my lady," stammered Francis, his eyes turning to Ford, as though for help.

"Well, tell him eight-thirty for Elkington House. No mistake, do you hear? And tell Mason, dinner early. And I'm ready for Léontine at once,—I want her here for Miss Addenbroke. That's all."

Francis, after one helpless look about him at the circle, went.

How Jones got away from the room he hardly knew. Lady Ashwin, attending to Lisette, did not notice him again, or appear to be aware of his existence,—not that he could have found anything to say to her. Lisette, piteously white and languid, gasped his name after him, but even for her he could not, dared not, wait. He followed Ford, since man clings to man in these emergencies. All the world had changed for Jones,—he could not imagine now how he had taken so much for granted. Without, the sublime calm of the great house was broken, shivered in all directions. As they passed the head of the staircase, two maids, conversing in undertones, separated. Both were weeping,—it was a house of mourning beyond the sanctuary of its mistress. One of the young women appealed anxiously to Ford, who stopped to listen to her question. He was treated by all much like a son of the house, with a slight difference: a difference of more, not less, respect, since he was Sir Claude's confidante and representative.

"I can't tell you, Edith, I'm sorry," were the finishing

words Jones caught. "Mr. Shovell couldn't talk of it. We shall none of us know till the doctor comes, probably." And they went on down the last flight, and through the swing door to the peace of Dr. Ashwin's little study. That was the quarter where Jones, on entering the house, had heard the voices that should have warned him, in his flattering dreams, of tragedy.

V

Ford begged him to be seated, but there was barely any chance of a *tête-à-tête*. They went out of the back-water now, with a vengeance, and in the very vortex of the great doctor's affairs. The telephone bell went incessantly; all London, Jones would have said, was engaged in ringing up Sir Claude.

"Excuse me," said Ford blandly to Jones, at intervals. "This is the way it goes on all day. I've perjured myself up to the eyes in excuses for him for a week past, and now it's going to be worse. He says he can't,—or he won't, more commonly,—and I have to find them pretty reasons. Nearly all women, you know,—that makes it worse. They can't understand being neglected. But if it's a fact Angus has handed the case to him—*Well*, Francis?"

Having got clear of the telephone, just as Mr. Ford was settling in his chair for a well-earned rest, came a knock.

"Please, sir," said Jones' acquaintance, the young footman, "would you mind going to Lady Ashwin about it? Joliffe won't."

"Good Lord," groaned Ford, "here's revolution! What next?" He got up once more to face the new complication. "Nonsense, Francis. Joliffe must, if Lady Ashwin wishes it."

"He won't, sir," said Francis. "Joliffe says, Mrs. Gibbs said Sir Claude might want him, any time up to midnight,—and he won't."

"That's Shovell's mother,—she's down there," Ford mentioned aside for Jones' benefit. He stood considering a second. "Joliffe must manage something," he said with finality. "It's absurd, with two cars, you know. I suppose I shall have to see him." He turned back to the man: "Did you give Lady Ashwin's other messages,—about dinner and so on?"

"Well, sir, Mason's not there," said Francis, looking ever more sheepish and less like a footman as he proceeded. "Miss Violet needs careful feeding, sir, and Miss Violet's Alison is not quite up to it, Mason said. Knowing, since she taught her, sir. So she took some wine and cream, and Joliffe took her down there at five o'clock. Probably Mason meant to return, sir," he added, with an effort in excuse, "but she's not."

"Do you mean we are to get no dinner?" said Mr. Ford, gazing upon him with a humorously hopeless expression, suggesting that he was quite prepared for the worst. He knew these old servants.

"I don't know, sir," said Francis vaguely. "They can manage something downstairs, I expect."

"Is that all?" said Ford, after a pause. Francis considered.

"There's Léontine, sir; *she's* nearly off her head in the servants' hall. I don't know if you could——"

"No," said Ford with energy. "I won't tackle a hysterical Frenchwoman, anyhow. I draw the line. I've often been doubtful, Francis, as to what my job really is in this house, but I'm sure that doesn't come under it. Léontine must speak to Lady Ashwin herself."

"She will, sir," confided Francis. "That's it, if you understand me. That's what we're afraid of, if she once goes up. And Mason's not there to manage her. She can't stop herself easy, Léontine. She's using awful terms, sir, in her language."

"*Vive la France!*" said Ford beneath his breath. "She'll say some of it." The hand by his side was

clenched, Jones saw, and he looked elated. Ford had had to look on at much in that house, both in the new times and the old, and he had suffered himself from Eveleen's insolence. "Very good," he said to Francis. "Léontine must take her risks. Her law's not ours, or barely. Send Joliffe along here, will you, if he can leave the car?—though it's little good," he added to Jones, as Francis shut the door. "We're in for it, if Joliffe leads the way. Determination's not the word for Joliffe; he's bedrock obstinacy when he likes. . . . They worship Mrs. Shovell, the whole gang of them," he added, in elucidation of the politics this comparative stranger, perforce, was studying.

It was not necessary to tell Jones that,—and yet he loved to hear it. He had discovered her at last in the atmosphere that had so blankly lacked her presence. He only needed to plunge through the upper layers to find her at every turn. She was even in this room, in bridal clothes, on the chimney-piece, ousting her mother, or at least claiming a place from her, in a like array. The larger portrait was framed, a permanency, hanging against the wall; the smaller, in the softer tinting of modern photography, was leaning unframed against it, suggesting a recent acquisition, still handled by a proud father, and handed about to a curious world. Jones' eyes were on the faces, comparing them, during much of the ensuing dialogue.

"Joliffe—look here! Can't you do it?" Young Ford, sitting down upon the table, adopted a new manner, friendly almost, and somewhat appealing. "Elkington House is no distance, and you can come back in between."

"I can't help it, sir," said Joliffe, in the tone of condescending explanation to an ignorant world. "Orders' orders, you see, sir. I was told to wait."

"It wasn't Sir Claude told you."

"It was Mrs. Gibbs," said Joliffe, "and she knows what she says. Mrs. Gibbs has managed all the doctors, first and last."

"You don't draw your salary from Mrs. Gibbs,—come now," said Ford.

"I do not, sir," said Joliffe gravely. "But the question, to my mind, hardly enters the case."

"I merely mean, Lady Ashwin's orders are orders too."

A pause, while Joliffe looked tolerant of this quibbling, on the part of young Mr. Ford. Joliffe's duty, as the secretary well knew, was not to her ladyship but to the doctor.

"There's the other car," remarked Ford.

"There is," said Joliffe. "But if you imagine Lady Ashwin will be seen at the door of Elkington House in the other car, I must undeceive you."

"Well, you could have it, couldn't you?"

"I could not, Mr. Ford, excuse me, since it might be a question of speed. Sir Milford Angus lives some way out, and if they should want him again after the offices shut——"

"Pray heaven they won't," said Hubert involuntarily.

"Heaven or no, I'd sooner have the car ready," said Joliffe. "After the week we've had, we're not so sure of heaven as that." Joliffe reckoned himself in among the doctors, evidently. "Anyhow, I'm not taking her out to-night," he added simply. "Sir Claude wouldn't like it."

"It's not your place to say what Sir Claude would like," observed Ford, "or mine."

"No, sir," said Joliffe unperturbed, "but we may know."

"But, my good man," said Ford, slipping into confidence, and bending towards him, "she'll go in any case. She's been talking of it for a week back."

The chauffeur joined his gloved hands behind him.

"She may go—*anywhere* for me, Mr. Ford, in a hired hack. She doesn't come with me to-night. Who sent Miss Violet down to Dover in that weather by her grumbling when she wasn't fit to stir? Who teased her into this fever she never should have had with proper handling? I married a wife, Mr. Ford, and I know—better than you. Sir Claude knows well enough himself who's answerable,—he'd not blame me,—he didn't before. In any case, I risk my place. Who never even sent to inquire, playing with that new doll of hers,—not that I've a word against Miss Addenbroke," said Joliffe hastily. "They kept the whole from Miss Addenbroke on purpose,—that's Sir Claude. She suffering like that for a week past, between life and death these two days, and losing her baby to-night. It's past hope when Mrs. Gibbs gives up, I know that. I saw it in her face. She loves Miss Violet, she's done all a woman could. And her own mother—— It's not to be thought of by decent people," Joliffe summed up his oration, "and I won't. That's the long and short of it. Good night, sir."

"She'll sack them all," said Ford thoughtfully, when the chauffeur was gone. "And what Sir Claude will say when he comes—we'd best not ask. The only hope is, I may be sacked myself by then, so it'll no longer be my business. Not that it is in any case, of course, but there's literally no one else to do it. Joliffe's a ripper,—fellow in a thousand, isn't he? I like the way he broke out and stamped on me. Married a wife!—it was scriptural." He added after an interval, seeing the direction of Jones' eyes,— "That's Mrs. Shovell, the smaller one. You have met her, haven't you?"

Jones, at the permission granted him by the words, got up and crossed to the portrait.

"Yes," he said, "I met them down in Cornwall,—same time as I met Miss Addenbroke,—on their wedding tour. Couldn't see much of her in the nature of things, you know, but still——"

"Shovell's friendly," said Ford. "He doesn't absolutely cut you out, I mean, does he? Good-hearted,—I was beastly sorry for him to-night."

They were both giving themselves away, of course, hand over hand, and quite unaware of it. Once more the mighty powers of love and pity were mercifully confused. Pity reigned supreme for the moment over this house where Violet had dwelt; and under the shelter of that presence any little love that was lurking could air itself unashamed. They both talked of little else for nearly an hour, since the telephone gave Hubert a respite, and it was an exquisite hour to Jones. He had not realized,—having the business mind,—a private secretary's position, still less the position of a secretary in this house, for it was certainly exceptional.

Lately, noticing the attitude of the household towards his present host, Marmaduke had begun to suspect his privileges. Now he became convinced of them rapidly, as he picked up Ford's casual confidences. Ford had known her long before marriage,—since she was sixteen. He had had innumerable chances of her company in her own family circle, even *tête-à-tête* in intimate talk. He had stories of her by the dozen, laughable and serious, for she had always stirred laughter about her, he perceived, as well as love. Ford, infinitely blest, had dined with her, danced with her, disputed with her very frequently; he had played and sung with her in the winter evenings, and on the summer mornings lifted her upon her horse. He spoke of her like a little sister almost, since such men as Ford speak of their sisters with respect. It was both charming to listen to and fortifying to Jones' inner case as well.

For,—you will observe,—other men felt as he did towards Shovell's wife, and were not ashamed of stating their opinions aloud, at least in times like these. Thus—what followed may be guessed. The movement of Marmaduke's heart towards her was justified, and he need

have no further misgivings. She just produced eddying circles of such eager devotion, he supposed, wherever she walked about the world. And fifty "fellows" in London,—perhaps a hundred and fifty,—would be feeling just like Jones, under the shock of this overmastering news, as well.

As for details of her present state, Ford could offer little to supplement what Jones' sympathy had already collected. The secretary had only seen his chief by flashes for ten days past; for it seemed Mrs. Shovell had been seriously ill for a week before the premature birth of her child. Charles, when he brought the last news that afternoon, had been too exhausted, physically and mentally, to impart, as Ford had been too stunned by the central fact to inquire. They had hoped to save that child for her, after all she had suffered for it; it was a cruel, crushing disappointment for all concerned, for the grandmother had been hopeful the first two days. Charles' disappointment was the worst, as Jones well understood, owing to his peculiar, almost childish confidence in his mother and the doctors. Yet it was his mother herself who had shorn his hopes to the ground that evening; so Charles, as is the way with the so-called sanguine temperament, had dropped straightway to the other extreme, despairing of Violet and all; and none of Ford's suggestions, gathered from a not inconsiderable medical experience, had been able to reassure him.

"Sir Claude will be late, I suppose," said Marmaduke, looking rather shy, when he finally rose to go.

"Any hour up to midnight, obviously. He couldn't say himself, I expect, when Joliffe left. He'll be sorry to miss you," said the representative, remembering his charge.

"Thanks, but that's not what I meant. You won't see him yourself, I suppose?"

"Certainly, I shall wait,—till midnight if necessary. I've lists of questions, anyhow," said Ford in his own ex-

cuse. "You'd like a line, perhaps," he added, almost instantly. (Blessed be the business habit, which makes room for the claims of all!)

"It's adding to your work," said Jones. "You'd be awfully good. Can't help thinking of her, you know,—and Shovell too."

"It's the worst time of a man's life, they say," said Ford. They were both very sorry for Charles, now and then.

"Well, you'd be awf'ly good," said Jones. "Like to show you round my little place some time. Do you bicycle?"

"Rather!" The secretary laughed. "Couldn't live long without, the way the doctor behaves. He's like quicksilver to catch, soft and sudden. Always round the next corner by the time you're at the last."

"I know what you mean," said Jones, who found the image most apt, though not to Sir Claude. "Well, some Sunday, then. Don't bother to write,—must be sick of writing. Take your chance, what?"

"Thanks awfully," said the other young man; and they parted, as if they had known one another for years, on the steps.

VI

Sir Claude came home towards midnight. He looked very tired, though less ghastly than Charles. For one thing he had had the work, and Charles merely the waiting; for another he was always pale. He appeared absent too, to the man who let him in, as though he dragged himself with difficulty from another world. Francis, the footman, knew instinctively from that look, at once lofty and vague, what had occurred. It was more terrible by far than any severity could have been, and as he took the doctor's thick coat, for Claude had been driving himself, he was absolutely trembling; but his master did not seem to notice it. He heard the news of his wife's absence,

Francis told the awed circle in the kitchen afterwards, without a sign, looking through the man with his dark eyes, as though he followed with an effort.

"Elkington House?" he repeated. "Ah, yes, that was to-night." He reached the hall table, and rested the fingers of one hand upon it. "Mr. Ford is gone, I suppose," he said, still absently.

"No, sir; in the study," said Francis. "You've dined, sir?" he added, fearing literally that he might drop where he stood; for their doctor had barely the strength of one man, though he commonly did the work of three.

"Yes—no—I can't remember. Tell them to send something to the study, will you?—anything there is. And, Francis——" His back was turned, by the table.

"Yes, sir?"

"Tell them Miss Violet's baby died at nine o'clock. They will be sorry."

"Yes, sir." The man was almost voiceless. "Miss Violet, sir?"

"Better, a trifle, but very weak. Milford Angus said she would do, before he left. Mrs. Gibbs is wonderful,—she and Mrs. Mason are taking the night. Alison,—isn't it?—will come here in Mason's place in the morning." He moved, and turned aside in the direction of the study door.

Francis made a mighty effort, and stopped him.

"Beg pardon, Sir Claude. Miss Addenbroke——"

"What?"

"She's not so well, sir,—in Miss Violet's old room. Léontine's been trying, since Lady Ashwin left, but she won't speak to her."

"Has she heard?" Claude came to life, looked himself almost, and spoke sharply.

"I believe—her ladyship——" Francis was cut off.

"Put dinner back half an hour, will you? And tell Mr. Ford I must not keep him,—simply that."

Francis told Mr. Ford in the study "simply that," and

Mr. Ford did not even change his lazy attitude by the fire. He remarked that there would be time to get the food hot, and the man agreed.

"What's he look like?" said Ford in confidence. The footman shrugged.

"The baby died at nine," he confided in return, as he knelt to make up the fire. "She's better, God bless her; round the corner, they think."

"He wouldn't have come home, otherwise," said Hubert. "A jolly house for him,—oh, Lord!" After a short interval of consideration, he swung himself up, and wrote to Jones.

"Tiens, le docteur!" said Lady Ashwin's maid, an elegant young female, rising lightly from beside Felicia's low chair. "Elle est navrée, monsieur, la pauvre petite. Voilà bien quatre heures que Miladi est partie,—pas un mouvement, pas un signe. Pas moyen de la faire pleurer, regarder son enfant, rien! Elle paraît accablée,—comment dirai-je?—prosternée,—anéantie! Elle a un si excellent cœur!"

This flood of eloquence, which Léontine's feelings had been storing up for hours, broke its bounds suddenly at "le docteur's" appearance,—since here was at last a person who could comprehend both the feelings themselves, and the language in which they were conveyed.

Léontine, it should be mentioned, being without the circle swayed by Joliffe and Mason, had been the one party in opposition, when the household staff fell into line, by Miss Violet's command, with the necessary attitude to Miss Addenbroke. Léontine, with her Gallic independence, swung impudently clear of the prescribed attitude, and told anybody who would listen to her, perpetually and in detail, what she thought.

Now Léontine's private pose had modified into one more friendly, though equally French; for since Lady Ashwin, in a hired motor, had finally departed to dine

with friends, Léontine and Lisette had been *tête-à-tête*. An "excellent cœur" will excuse you at the gates of purgatory, if not from all items of retribution, at least from much. Léontine, who had herself wept quarts, for hours, over her loved Miss Violet, and used terms about her mistress that had alarmed all the servants, had proved herself beyond all question the only person of heart in the servants' hall. Now Lisette's still whiteness, over her fretful baby, seemed at once more striking and more commendable, even than her own copious meed of tears. The scene on which "le docteur" entered, in the room that had once been his daughter's, was very moving, certainly. Léontine was sure Sir Claude, whose taste was so perfect, would be impressed, and waited breathless for his commentary.

Unfortunately, Monsieur showed no sign of admiration, either of Lisette's condition, or of Léontine's efforts to improve upon it. As soon as his eyes fell on the girl he sent the attendant packing, firing off a list of orders in her own language that it took all her attention to remember, and the quest for which carried her fluttering, first to the distant kitchen, and then into every corner of the house in turn.

By the time she came back, Monsieur, by some occult means known to him, had roused the little mother to some show of life, and her beautiful strange eyes were following his movements about the room. She still looked frightened, but more composed. Léontine, paralyzed with admiration on her side, having quite given up expecting it on his, stood transfixed in a beautiful attitude to watch him feed her. Monsieur did it like a mother almost,—his gentleness was divine. What was more, Mademoiselle received it divinely. It had not occurred to Léontine that, since Mademoiselle refused food in words, she might still take it, if produced beneath her nose in appetizing quantity. Felicia did,—she took any amount, all Claude would give her, and her color began to return.

"Kindly remember in future," said Monsieur, in his softest voice and most freezing utterance, speaking over her fair head to the maid, "that since emotion implies exhaustion, food is the *first* thing. Sentiment and sympathy come some distance after, though excellent in their place. Conversation comes last of all. You must know this in your own case, I think,—thus it would have been simple to transfer it to hers."

"En effet," murmured Léontine, surprised. She had, as a fact, discovered that appetite and emotion were allied. She had consumed, still weeping, an enormous dinner, and marveled how Monsieur should know it.

"You might have added to it," said Monsieur, in the same weary tone and perfect accent, "the somewhat obvious fact that, whereas you are nourishing but one individual at the present time, as I trust sufficiently, this child is nourishing two; which makes it, especially to a woman such as you, a matter of mere duty to be prompt."

"Miladi——" began Léontine. He cut her off.

"Lady Ashwin probably thought it so obvious that she did not mention it. She is the last person who would have overlooked the necessity. Now leave us, if you please, alone."

Léontine made a graceful withdrawal, reflecting that Monsieur was tired. Besides, he was an ill-used husband,—and a charming man,—and besides, the last observation was true. Lady Ashwin would never have overlooked it. It was singular how, knowing "Miladi" as he did, and with the attraction he could exert at will, he yet allowed her freedom to mock herself of him at all points so completely. Léontine, it may be observed, found life in this English household most interesting; though her own part of the work with Lady Ashwin was at once more arduous, and less amusing, since Mademoiselle her beloved had quitted it.

"That's coming right again, isn't it?" said Claude,

touching the smooth brow beneath Felicia's tangled hair. Her strange eyes were spent with weeping, as he saw. He had thought Eveleen would have had the sense to spare her, but Eveleen was beyond all prevision and prediction now. "Will you have the baby?"

Lisette nodded, and watched while he fetched it, critically. But she could not deny he knew how to deal with it, and he laid it very cleverly in her arms. As he bent down with the child, though, something in the attitude seemed to strike her, awakening a memory; and she clung to him with one hand, tugging a little to draw him near.

"I want you to stop, you know," she observed, frowning slightly. "There's something else."

"Surely not," said Claude, smiling upon the lovely group. That did little good, however, for he was like Violet when he smiled.

"I *want* you," she insisted. "Here."

So he gave way to the coaxing hand, and let her take possession of him completely, since that was her desire. Lisette had no idea of a man, even though it might be a doctor, dividing his attention. Besides, for all his need of instruction in nursing matters, she had grown very fond of Violet's father during the period, now happily past, of her terror and pain. Sir Claude, on his side, had succumbed with pitiable ease to Lisette, as his daughter had prophesied. Whenever life needed improvement, Lisette had applied to him with unfailing success. He had dismissed the stuck-up nurse for her, for instance, with praiseworthy decision and promptitude; he had re-furnished and adapted this room for her and the baby, with an elaborate attention she could not but approve; he had already given her a number of pretty things for her personal use and adornment; and she had good hope of the pearls, in time.

"It's not dead," she murmured, pushing her fair head against his sleeve, just as though by coaxing she could

persuade. She could not, though; nothing could persuade him. Lisette looked up at his face several times in the next few minutes, but its inexorable gravity did not change. She swallowed the truth with a little gulp, her face twisting slightly with the effort.

"Did she cry?" she asked him softly, still fingering him with one hand, while the other fingers guided instinctively her beautiful infant to her beautiful breast.

"She hardly realizes what has happened, my dear; she is too weak to understand. She is worse than you were," said Claude. "Has been throughout."

"Oh!" A gasp. Lisette had considered her own sufferings unequaled,—a disgrace to whatever Authority was in command. So had Eveleen done, Claude remembered, though both were ideal cases. He was not quite sure, at times, in his progress through the thickest of the skirmish, they were not right.

"Who will tell her?" pursued Felicia. "You?"

"I, or Charles' mother. She might do it best."

"No,—you," ordained Lisette. "Violet would rather; she's keen on you. Promise you will tell her."

He promised, holding her close. Her little efforts at sympathy, over the edge of her nature, as it were, were infinitely lovable; as her beauty was, in his weariness, pure consolation. Claude thought of his Violet, as she had been when he reached her side at last,—wrecked and prostrate, as though the wheel of life had passed across her; and the marvelous wisdom and depth of her gray eyes, before they recognized him that night, and the infantile trust and sweetness, when they did. It was wonderful for a scientist, a privilege he recognized in his pain, to be allowed to study two such types of womanhood, in a like crisis, side by side.

Lisette abandoned herself to the child for a time, contentment spreading slowly, like the light up the morning sky, across her face. Then it clouded faintly.

"I can't show him to her now," she murmured. "Can I?"

"In time," said the doctor. "He will only grow better for waiting a little."

"Yes," Lisette agreed. Then suddenly, with a most sensitive gesture, she drew the shawl right across the little face.

"Do *you* mind?" she inquired, biting her lip, and glancing at him.

He shook his head, and his hand uncovered the child again. But Lisette had seen,—she had the quick artist eye. He looked tormented, just as once she had made Violet look, when she told a brutal story in her presence, in the train.

"You saw it, didn't you?" she ventured soon, her hand still coaxing him to be happy.

"Yes. Don't worry about our cares, my dear. You should go to sleep."

But she persisted. "What was it like?"

"Pretty and small. Beautiful little limbs," said Claude.

"Like her?"

"I thought so. Charles' mother thought like Charles."

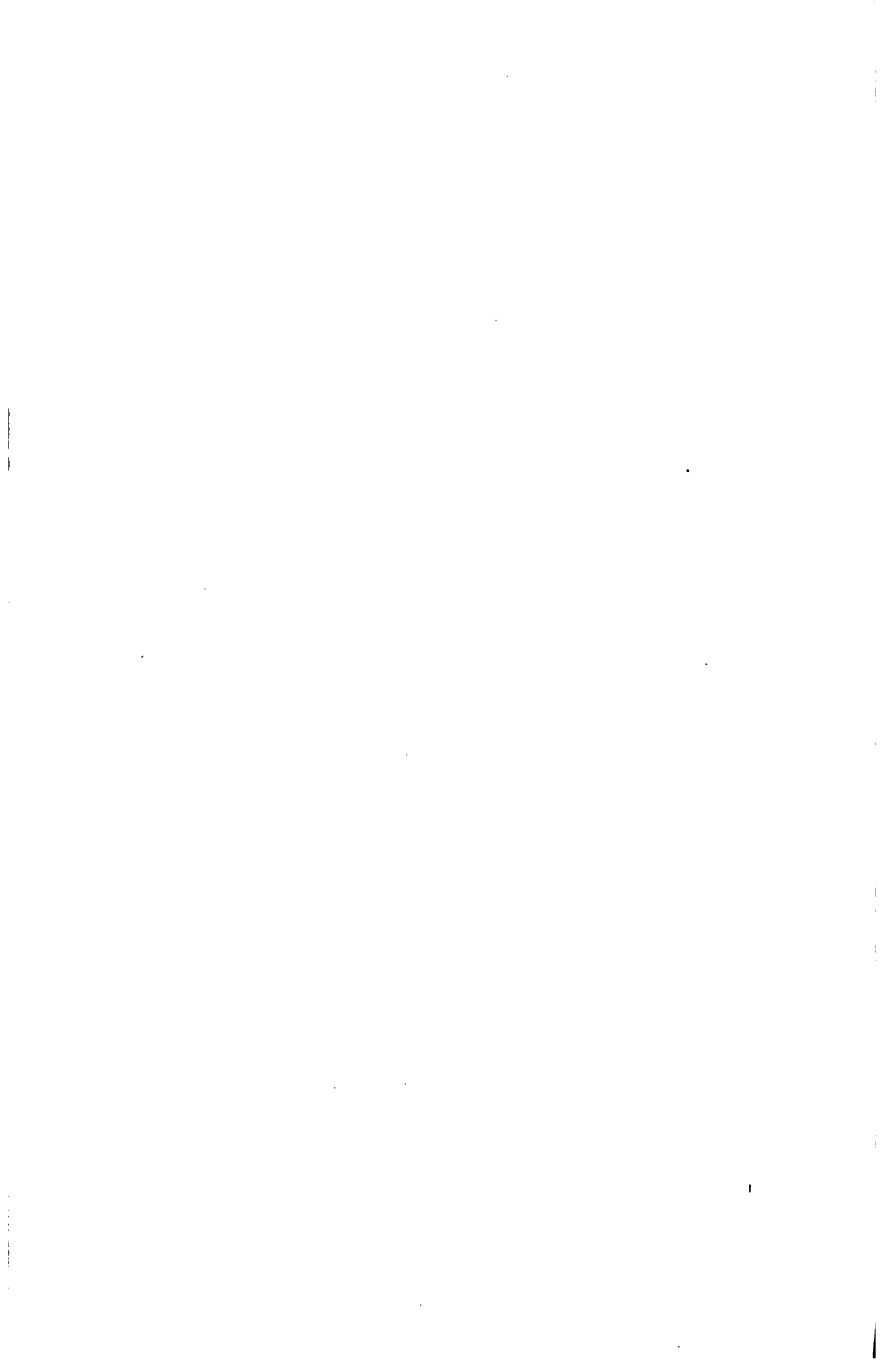
"Yes." She nodded, knowing about that. Light and shade, for some minutes, struggled in her face. Her thoughts were working, he was sure, with the fingers working on his sleeve. Claude watched her intently, witnessing, he was aware of it, one of the miracles of life. Felicia was feeling for a soul, like the fabled Undine. Being Claude, he was not at all sure that he wished it; he had seen the wraith she was at sixteen, and Claude loved wraiths. He longed to entreat her not to struggle with them further; but she did.

"I oughtn't to have teased her in the carriage, you know," she murmured. "It was beastly, really,—but I felt beastly,—see? I'd have kissed her instead if I had known. I meant to when I saw her standing on the pier, but I was sick and tumbled. After that I forgot. I'd

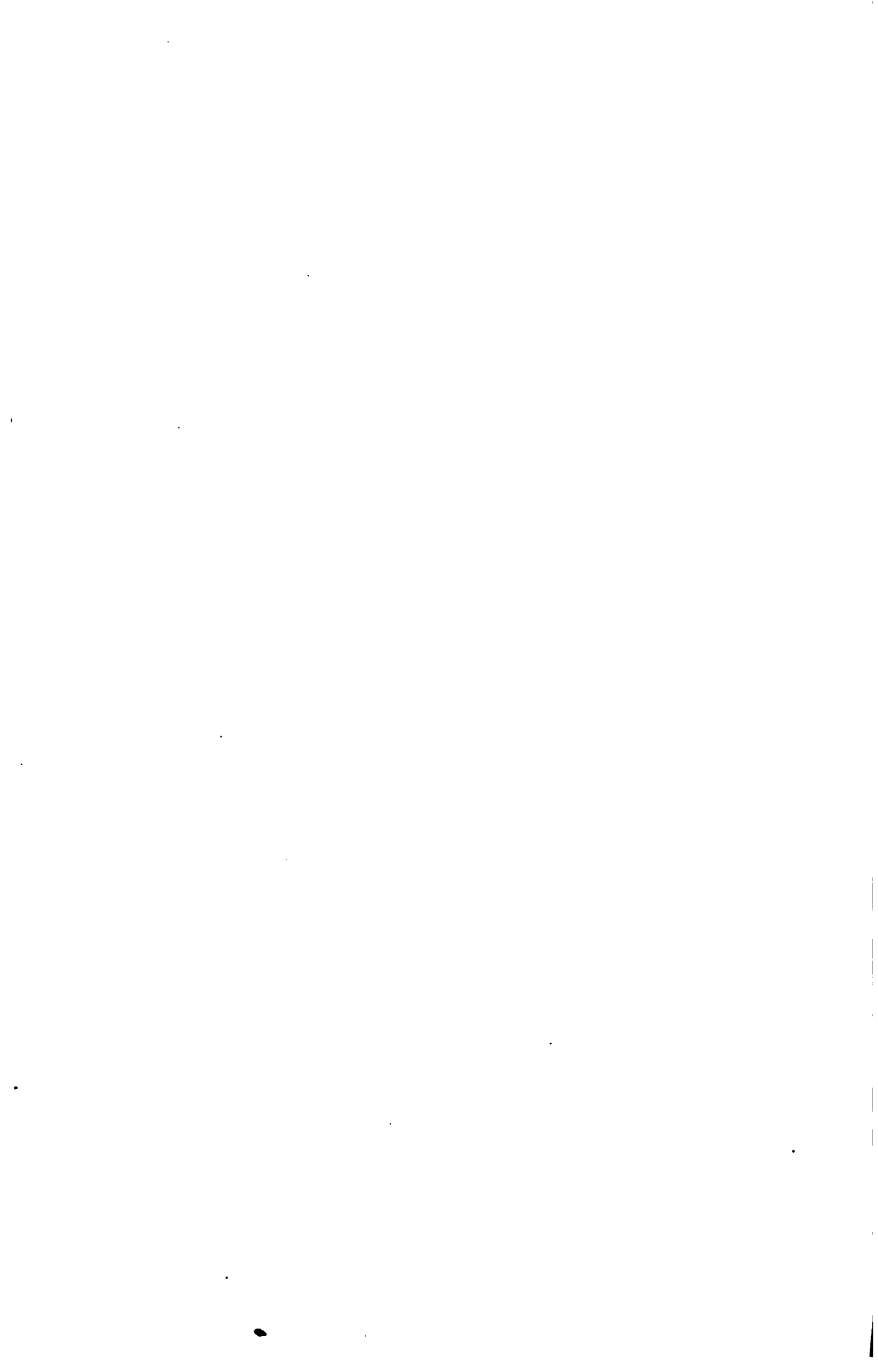
like to now. She's done a lot for me,—she and Duke,——” Her voice was failing, from sleep as much as emotion.

“I will kiss her for you to-morrow, shall I?” said Claude.

“Yes; that'll do.” She patted him, approving, with her hand. To get the thing off her mind so easily was delightful, and the last clouds from another's sorrow soon passed. Her lashes were drooping already, before the confession was completed; and she was asleep soon after, in his arms.



PART III



I

THE NARRATORS AT FAULT

I

JONES' proposal came as a shock to the world. Dramatically, Jones was a complete success on this occasion, for he surprised even the curious compilers of his narrative, and he had the honor of flabbergasting the Ingestres, who refused, for some time, to believe in Jones' existence. They had a vague idea somebody had invented him in a story-book; and when Charles Shovell, facing John Ingestre's wife in his own dining-room, swore solemnly to Jones' existence, in the life, at Leatherhead, Agatha seemed still to suspect Charles' extravagant imagination of carrying him away.

"Men don't do those sort of things," argued Agatha.

"No men do the kind of things Jones does," said Charles, with pride. "Look at his record up to now,—astonishing!"

Agatha had come, in the first instance, on family business for John; and secondly, to do the proper thing by the poor little people, as she kindly called them; and thirdly, with the fixed intention, for her own sake, of seeing Violet. She had good hope now of succeeding in all her objects, except the fixed intention; and that disappointment was only due to the unlucky chance of having found Violet's doctor on the premises. Agatha was confident she could, but for Claude, have accomplished it. As it was, having been tranquilly defeated by the professional manner, which baffled her in a person like Claude, who had always been very polite to her before, accepting her sadly, as he did most of his wife's

relations,—Agatha intended to take her revenge upon him later on. She had, as the emissary of the family, some questions to ask of him as well, when she had, so to speak, drained Charles. Charles lent himself to the inquisitor easily,—almost too easily. He talked too much. No efforts of Agatha's could restrict him to even probable-sounding facts, in the matter of Mr. Jones. One would have said, on this subject, Mr. Shovell's tongue was in practice.

"From the first moment my eye fell on him," said Charles, "—perhaps I should say our eye, never mind,—I marked him down. I said, a mystery. She denied it, but then, she hasn't my flair. Besides, she always contradicts me in the first instance. I said his colorless appearance was against him, and he could be no common man. I said,—my dear, something lurks beneath that drab disguise. If you don't believe me," summed up Charles, "ask her."

"I can't," said Agatha resentfully, looking across the room at Claude. "That's what I came for, naturally,—not to sit here listening to your fairy-tales."

"Jones as a fairy," said Charles dreamily. "Mrs. Ingestre, you may be right."

Charles sat on a corner of his dining-room table, gently swinging his foot, and watching his mother, who, contributing little to the conversation, though her expression seemed critical of her son's absurdities, was engaged in darning his socks.

Mrs. Ingestre cleared her throat. Taking her time, since nobody seemed in a hurry, fortunately, or inclined to turn her out, she looked about her through her lorgnette at the room. It was an extraordinarily pretty room, and in exquisite order: but so was all the house. Such comfort and cleanliness, in a house so lately convulsed by illness, was gratifying to a good house-mistress like Mrs. John, who had "backed" the young Mrs. Shovell. No signs of storm were to be seen; on all sides the place

was pretty and peaceful. The aspect of the maid who admitted her alone would have proved good management, the composure and alertness combined which suggests at once, to one of Agatha's training, a firm hand upon the reins. The same unobtrusive competence breathed in the atmosphere of this room. The little garden through the window was orderly too, though hardly larger than the table on which Charles sat. Tulips of sedate design adorned it, daintily dressed in white and pink. Their faint fragrance, with that of the warm wet earth, drifted in from time to time through the open window. They were at their proudest moment, the very climax of their effort to redeem the London garden, and please the careful gardener: and it seemed a pity that the gardener's eyes, in her upper room, were turned away.

Charles' eyes were on the tulips, too, when he grew tired of watching the interesting way in which his mother's needle wriggled through his socks. He had already informed her that she did it as well as Violet, very nearly: but she seemed less gratified by the compliment than one would have expected. Mrs. Gibbs had darned Charles' socks for twenty-four years, and her daughter-in-law not yet for one, which may have been the reason of her imperturbability. Charles had always worn them out with shameful rapidity, and Mrs. Gibbs had strongly advised Violet, before her marriage, not to undertake the task.

Agatha, moving her attention, and her eye-glass, from the room to the people in occupation of it, found them also worth study, in their way. The attitude and behavior of all three gave her the impression of that rather languid idleness which is the reaction from prolonged strain, physical and mental. They were pleased to rest and chaff a little with the first comer, and touch, through Agatha's medium, the outer world again. That languor was what gave the house also, on entering it, a little the air of a sleeping palace, none within its precincts daring

to stir: although, as the visitor was thankful to think, the princess had been aroused, and with her awakening, life must flow back to it soon.

Claude looked ill, simply: but then Agatha, having heard of Eveleen's latest proceedings on all hands in the town, had been more or less prepared for that. Eveleen was dragging her husband into notoriety, and he detested and shrank from it,—the more that he was bound, in the nature of things, to face it daily. Agatha, as has been said, postponed that part of her investigation till she could catch him privately. The young master of the house seemed fighting lassitude all the time he talked with his customary careless freedom. Half Charles' mind seemed elsewhere, or mislaid completely. He was also conspicuously submissive to direction in the person of his mother, and Agatha could see Mrs. Gibbs watching him from time to time. She suspected that, far from assisting the workers, he had very nearly added another case to Violet's. That is the habit of cheerful characters like Charles. Mrs. Gibbs herself, who seemed to have both these wandering husbands in hand, and to be acting as Eveleen's most efficient substitute in everything that concerned the girl, showed signs of the past campaign only in the guarded calm of her comely features, and the lips she set oddly in repose. Mrs. Ingestre liked the look of the Rector's wife, a woman of her own stamp, and intended to get some truth out of her as well, before she left the house. At present, having this incredible business of Felicia's to finish for John, she must stick to her colors, she supposed, and try to extract something from the men. They must know something, after all, though they both trifled persistently.

"Do you mean," said Agatha, "that the young fellow means to marry the girl, as a fact? Is that what you wish me to believe?"

"It would seem to be his intention," said Claude, with caution. "He is constantly at my house."

"Would seem! I beg you to observe, Claude, that you are in charge of her. Has he proposed it?"

"To her? I can't say. She is certainly," said Claude, "leading him the life of a man who is under vow. But that may be her ordinary method."

"And yet," said Agatha incisively, "you say I am to believe he is not the father of the child?"

"I say nothing—heaven forbid! Address yourself to Charles."

Agatha addressed her eye-glass to Charles.

"Completely and utterly impossible," said Charles.

"Why impossible? These quiet little men,—one never knows their lives. He might have known the Addenbokes before. You met him quite casually, did you not? Why shouldn't he have been deceiving you?"

"Because he is as incapable of deceiving," said Charles superbly, "as we are of being deceived."

"Have you made the least attempt," challenged Agatha, "to find out any facts about him?"

"Perpetual attempts," said Charles. "Violet and I practically devoted ourselves to that, during the latter half of our honeymoon. Ask her if——"

"I shan't ask her,—I can't. I wish you would stop talking about it. Besides, you do her injustice. Violet is not at all that sort of girl, gossiping and inquisitive. She has a thoroughly nice mind."

"Oh—thanks," said Charles. "You little know."

"I shall advise John to investigate," said Mrs. Ingestre.

"Violet and I," observed Charles, "might have investigated Jones to the Judgment-day and not damaged our nice minds in the smallest degree. We were convinced at least of that before we lost him."

"He met the girl when you did, I presume? At the same hotel, and so on?"

"Lisette?"

"Whom else should I mean? You're half asleep," observed Mrs. Ingestre, looking at him closely.

"Beg pardon." Charles roused. "Yes. Jones sat next Lisette at dinner. He supplied her with a laughing-stock, and innumerable pieces of bread. He watched her face like a lover in the train. He abandoned his just share of the sandwiches to her, and was her most unwilling model. I seldom saw a fellow more uncomfortable, for so long a time, as Jones. From the instant we parted with him," said Charles, warming to his work, "he followed her, and never left the trail. He must have spent fortunes on her, first and last. Blameless as he is, himself, from birth, Mrs. Ingestre,—I might say *by* birth, considering his origin——"

"What do you know of his origin?" said Agatha.

"Any amount," said Charles cheerfully; "and all to his credit. His ancestry is an open book to us, I may mention by the way. Blameless, I say, as Jones is, I never heard him criticize Lisette's morals,—except on one occasion."

"Well?" said Agatha patiently.

"When she sneaked a blouse of my wife's, and would persist in flaunting it on every occasion, appropriate and otherwise. I bet she does it still." Charles suddenly turned round.

"She does," said his father-in-law thoughtfully, "if you mean a garment the color of stage moonlight. I wondered why it seemed so familiar."

"There you are," said Charles to Agatha, as though proving all his points. "The girl has no moral sense. And still this misguided man will lead her to the altar-rails."

"You are a pair of very frivolous people," said Agatha. "Mrs. Gibbs, I appeal to you. Can you give me any facts about this case?"

"All of them," interposed Charles. "Mother knows them all, don't you, Mother? She had the last and most thrilling chapter last night. Jones was Mother's night-cap," he informed the visitor. "He lasted six evenings

with care, half an hour a night. . . . No, you don't."

He stretched a hand, apparently to shut his mother's mouth, but Mrs. Gibbs took hold of it calmly.

"Charles is a silly boy," she said to Agatha. "He does not believe the young man really cares for the girl, that's all. He thinks he is urged by duty in offering to marry her. Odd notion of duty," commented Mrs. Gibbs. "What ordinary people would call a piece of moonstruck romanticism. Only I do not call it that, because I think it more than likely Charles exaggerates the state of things altogether,—to say no worse."

"And what is the state of things?" said Agatha. "I must get some facts, for my husband, if possible. John has not Mr. Shovell's taste for fairies,—he will call them fiddlesticks. Do you mean he wants, in the good old phrase, to make the girl respectable?"

"By shutting the stable-door," said Mrs. Gibbs, with equal irony. "So I made out, with some trouble, from Charles' nonsense." She patted the hand in her lap.

"He wrote me a letter about it," said Charles, with dignity, "and wished to know if we approved."

"*You?*" said Agatha.

"Us," said Charles. "He seemed to need a lead in the matter, or a light from heaven. Ours very truly, E. M. Jones."

"What on earth have you to do with it? Why didn't he write to John?"

"That's what I wondered," said Charles politely, "at the time."

"Did Violet approve of him?" said Mrs. Ingestre, with a gleam of hope, after a pause.

"Immensely," said Charles. "She even went so far as agreeing with me, once or twice. And she thinks his idea of marrying Lisette is quite beautiful. Those were her words,—I asked her yesterday."

"I forbade the subject," observed Claude in the rear.

"She started it," said Charles, half-turning, "on my honor. There is something so irresistibly captivating about Marmaduke to us both. We cannot keep off him long."

"Marmaduke?" ejaculated Agatha.

"We rather like it now," said Charles. "It takes time and practice, but you get into the way. When he's our cousin, we shall call it him quite fluently."

As Agatha sat, endeavoring to see through Charles by means of the eye-glass, he finished dreamily—"Violet would prefer a Marmaduke to a Michael, any day. It's a handier breed."

"Don't be vulgar, Charles," said his mother. "A handy breed! You know Violet would never say such a thing. Try talking sensibly for a change. You are wasting Mrs. Ingestre's time."

"Claude," said Mrs. Ingestre, abandoning Charles. "I have heard you called a man of sense. Is there any sense at all in what your son-in-law is trying not to convey to me?"

"He is trying not to convey a fact that abashes him," said the doctor, "naturally; that a man may act purely on principle in the matter of his marriage. Not pick up the first decent-looking girl that comes."

"Look here," said Charles, rising. "If you have had enough of me, mention it. Mother's quite ready to take me back, aren't you, Mother?"

"Quite, my dear. Keep quiet now, for a little,—Sir Claude is going to explain." Obeying her hand on his arm, Charles sank down cross-legged at her feet, and in that modest attitude gazed respectfully at his father-in-law. So placed, he had the air of a school-boy, and Mrs. Gibbs evidently thought he was one, for she spared a hand from her work to put the hair straight on his forehead. The brow beneath the hair she lifted was furrowed slightly, Agatha noticed then: his eyes were clouded with arrears of exhaustion and sleeplessness, and

she could see, owing to his change of posture, the black band upon his arm. Mrs. Ingestre had always seen this young fellow as a father, easily. Charles had that look of a child-lover so fruitless to define. His were the kind of eyes that smile on children, and he had the form of nonsense at call that entertains them. She felt suddenly very sorry for this little household, shorn of its natural completion. It was hard, cruelly hard, upon them both: upon him as much, since he had doubtless seen his child.

"Well, Claude," she said, as the pause was prolonged. "It seems to take some consideration."

"It does," said Claude. "It is actually more in Charles' line than mine. It is lyrical, rather than scientific."

"Jones is lyrical," said Charles, dropping his head back. "*That* is the word I wanted, Mother."

"Hush!" said Mrs. Gibbs.

"This young Jones has a turn for humanity, I gather," the doctor proceeded, with obvious unwillingness, "and like all instinctive humanitarians, he objects to waste in the world. He wants to knock his nails on the head, and finish a work off neatly when he has begun it well."

"Aren't you confusing a humanitarian and an artistic cabinet-maker?" asked Charles, still lying with his head back on his mother's knee.

"No," said Claude,— "where was I? If it were merely to make the girl respectable, Agatha, Violet would certainly not approve the match. I have not asked her,—I ban all subjects of controversy, particularly that,—but I am sure. We are both with you as to that. But we believe,—Pussy believes,—it is a compact of security, and for mutual happiness as well. She is mistaken only as to one thing, the man's own feeling. He is doing it for her."

"What? For whom?"

"My daughter. For her reassurance and peace of

mind. He knows what she has been through about it. They are in—er—natural sympathy over the case.”

“But—this won’t do,” said Agatha, shifting her chair. “What are you talking about? Claude,—come!—you are an upright man.”

“No, no,”—he laughed, looking straight at her suddenly,—“that’s what I am not. I’m prostrate; so’s Charles. We are helpless, all of us. We simply have not the courage to undeceive her, she is so contented about it. It seems to her the correct ending to the quest, you see, and the hero’s just reward. She’s in the condition—being fit for little else,—of blessing them both——”

“Whereas both are in the condition of blessing her,” said Charles, with a laugh. “Well, Mother, doesn’t it come to that? We worked it out last night.”

Mrs. Gibbs did not encourage him in words, but her expression over her darning suggested that there was little in such a condition to surprise her. As for Agatha, she looked at one face after another, comically hopeless.

“It is really too much,” she murmured. “Not *in love* with her, Claude?”

“There’s my authority,” said Claude. “I really will not be responsible. Charles has all the documents.”

“And you think I should take his word for it?” Agatha swung round. “On his honeymoon, too? Of all arrant absurdities! Mr. Shovell, you have invented the whole thing,—confess, come! If you confess, I will own it is well invented,—and a perfectly natural mistake,” she added slyly.

“It’s a poor case,” the doctor admitted, amused. “Up with you, Charles. What have you to say?”

“Mrs. Ingestre,” said Charles, with solemnity, clasping his knees, “you do me wrong, indeed you do. I am not mistaken,—I wish I were. Unluckily, there’s only one witness I can produce, and that’s my wife. She’s already in the dock, of course, so it’s a little hard to manage. But since you’re all so beastly hard on me,

I shall jolly well make her convict herself. She is capable of it, really. Violet is not such a fool as she looks——”

“Charles!” his mother ejaculated.

“In this case, Mother. She does look one in this case, you know, considering her reputation. She’s rather smart as a rule,—about any other than Jones she’d have been level with me, easy,—bet you she would. It’s carelessness, chiefly,—absence of mind. She never really gave her mind to Jones as I could have wished.”

“You ought to thank your stars she didn’t,” said Agatha.

“I don’t,” said Charles. “It worries me when she’s absent like that,—a bad sign. You never know what she’ll be up to next. It’s not for want of hints, either,—I’ve given her heaps. Besides—good Lord!—the fellow’s condition was pitiable.”

“You only mean yours was,” said Agatha, who had abandoned everything now for the pleasure of teasing him.

“Mine wasn’t,” said Charles, ruffling. “Any of our common acquaintance been pitying me, Mrs. Ingestre?”

“Plenty,” said Agatha, smiling. His innocence was charming, and glancing at Claude, she found him faintly smiling too. Agatha was scoring, internally, over John at every word. John, like Eveleen, took the line that Violet had lost a chance, her best chance, of holding her husband, in losing the child. It was the Ingestre view, quite inevitable. John had sworn a round oath when the news came, as the head of a great house should swear at hearing of a son or daughter’s failure. Not that this Shovell child would be in the direct line, of course: it had not that gravity to John. But it was bad,—bad management, probably; though being fond of the girl he did not like to blame her directly. That was John’s general attitude, which his wife had not tried, in words, to combat. But she felt a kind of triumph now at finding

Charles,—“rogue” as she called him,—still hopelessly beneath the spell.

“She clean bowled him,” pursued Charles gravely, all unaware of his elders’ entertainment, “under my very eyes, upon the beach one day. What’s more, I told her so. She simply wouldn’t attend to me,—wasn’t interested. It’s a moral lesson against what I can only call subconscious flirting. It’s really awful for a fellow to be responsible for a girl who flirts subconsciously,—isn’t it, Mother?”

“It’s your imagination,” said Mrs. Gibbs, calmly darning over his head. “They were probably talking very nicely,—Violet never flirts.”

“However,” said Charles, returning to Agatha suddenly, “I don’t despair of her yet. Once give her a fair look-in with a free mind, and without my presence to distract her,—and she’ll get there, I back her to. I bet Margery Brading five shillings on it yesterday——”

“What?” cried Margery’s stepmother.

“Yes, Mother,—Margery took me. She’s gone downhill a bit since she left your place. Margery took me on the spot, because her theory is that Jones, given the same fair chance, without my presence to distract him, will lose his head, and give himself away before Violet can assume the cool, critical and impartial attitude that is essential to the——”

“I am ashamed of you,” said Mrs. Gibbs with energy, folding up his socks with an air of closing the conversation. “Ashamed of you both. I had not thought it of Margery, really. You have no right, either of you, to talk about Violet like that. And as to making bets about her——”

“I told Margery I didn’t quite like it,” said Charles. “She leads me on. You shouldn’t send us walking together if you don’t want my nice mind to be corrupted.”

“Get up,” said Mrs. Gibbs simply. “I think Mrs. Ingestre would like to see the garden.”

"May I go now?" inquired Charles in confidence, having got up as far as his knees.

Mrs. Gibbs glanced at the clock. "I have a great mind not to let you, after this," she said. She was grave, but Agatha saw she was teasing him too. "Well," she said, glancing at his face the instant afterwards, "you may, if she's awake. Go quietly, and take Mrs. Ingestre's flowers from the hall."

II

In the garden, Charles' mother apologized to Agatha for his childishness in her pleasantly impassive manner.

"He will never grow up," she said. "Certainly, if he has not this last month, he never will."

"Has he been ill?" said Agatha.

"Not really. His nerve gave way for a time. He has not much staying power, though quite good at a pinch. It lasted so long, you know, that was what finished him. I was glad to be there," she added quietly, "not only to keep an eye on him."

"You have done wonders, Claude says," said Mrs. Ingestre politely. "Is that pretty little Lady Brading your daughter?"

"My husband's daughter,—and Sir Claude's niece on the mother's side."

"Really? Had Claude a sister, then?" Mrs. Gibbs found she had to give the history.

"Charles is fond of Margery," she concluded, "and she is a good walker, so she comes to take him out. He used to walk alone in the country, but now he will not. I am afraid Violet has spoiled him,—he is quite lost without her. I even told him yesterday to get a dog. I cannot see," said Mrs. Gibbs gravely, "why a wife should include the duties of a dog, can you?"

Mrs. Ingestre, whose duties in her husband's house distinctly did, had no direct retort, but she proceeded to a systematic examination of her companion: who, drop-

ping her reticence by degrees, as they patrolled the patch of grass, gave her all the details she required. Mrs. Gibbs, being a partisan, as was natural, of the Ashwin contingent, had suspected Agatha at first of indifferent "fine-ladyhood" ; but she soon found she was unjust.

"It was by the merest luck," she said, "that I was back from Italy in time. Margery, little silly, said Violet was well; so I was taking it quite easily. There was still a good month, you see, before we thought we need be anxious, and I trusted my son to warn me,—rashly. Charles is not observant, and her acting deceived her father almost. My first hint of warning came from Sir Claude. I called here to see her one day, and—well, I sent for my things, and stayed. She was certainly not fit to be alone. She had not told Charles a thing,—I got it all out of her in an evening. Haunted absolutely, helpless, furious with herself, cut off all her active occupations, even letter-writing, which would have relieved her,—and the doctor talking down to her, like a child or an imbecile,—neglecting the worst signs. Providentially she trusts me; there was a time when she was nervous of me as a child, but that has passed. She was sweet as she always is, full of gratitude, surprise at my kindness,—most anxious for my comfort, not to mention my husband's,—quite ready to be confident, even over-patient, as I told her,—courage itself. The idea of treating that like a hysterical schoolgirl! I bore a good deal, first and last, from the specialist's rudeness," said Mrs. Gibbs, "but at least he put that man in his place."

Which led naturally to the battle of the doctors, those inner workings of which Lady Ashwin had had an inkling too.

"Why did Claude not attend her?" Agatha demanded.

"She had made him promise not,—anxiety for him again. He kept his promise, too, though it nearly killed him; until Angus himself gave way, with the worst pos-

sible grace, and made room for him. That was the day of the child's death, much the worst we had." Mrs. Gibbs set her lips. "A lot of babies they are themselves,—backbiting! It was all I could do not to tell that surly Scotchman what I thought,—I had the pleasure of hearing his opinion of Sir Claude behind his back. As though as a father he had not a perfect right to be anxious, quite apart from the fact that he proved right about her at nearly every point! It would be a maddening position for any man, but you would say they had no blood in them. I heard Angus when he capitulated,—huffy like a child, and on his dignity to the last. 'It is our opinion, Ashwin, that you may as well replace us. Mrs. Shovell seems reasonable,—should manage now.' Reasonable! They ran away from her reason, that was the long and short of it. They took good care to leave the breaking of the news to him. Personally, I have seldom been so thankful to anyone,—I thought that would be my part. . . . Angus was just as disagreeable," Mrs. Gibbs concluded her account, "in refusing Charles' money. On stilts at once,—Ashwin's daughter!—would not hear of it,—after having insulted him up and down. Attitudinizing to the last,—and a man like that sitting down under it,—that's what incensed me," said Mrs. Gibbs.

"Claude's too well-bred," said Agatha. "Pernickety. It's a drawback in his profession, and he admits it. He can't conceal the fact he is several other things besides a doctor, and the old stagers such as Angus don't like it. So they treat him as a dabbler, to pay him out. It's natural, if you come to think."

"He's too modest," said Mrs. Gibbs. "He said it was not his department when I entreated him to interfere. Well, it may not be, though really I doubt it. In any case, I can't help thinking, at the crucial points of our existence, a brain and a heart are the things that matter, and he is over-burdened with both. So is she."

"You've gone under to Claude," said Agatha, glancing at her. "But I don't call it a virtue to let yourself be put upon. Men can't afford it in these days. My theory is, Claude's had such practice at home in keeping his temper, that now it's become a habit, and he can't let it go when he should. He has one, thunder and lightning,—or used to have; but it's so useless, with Eveleen, that he has discarded it. He seems lifeless to me now, compared with what he was five years since."

Mrs. Gibbs was silent: but the name had been spoken, and her foot pressed the grass. Agatha waited a moment, and then swung on her.

"How far," she demanded, "can Eveleen be regarded as responsible? John will slay me if I cannot tell him that."

"Really," said Mrs. Gibbs, "I cannot say I have felt curious. She dislikes me particularly, which may be why I have seen no sign of her. She was not content with leaving undone the things she ought to have done,—she completed the Prayer Book. She made the girl wretched, that's a certainty,—and I hear,—it may be a lie,—she slandered Charles."

"Just so," said Agatha, with one glance at her face. Agatha also was the mother of a single son. "Well, we had best not speak of her." A pause, while she kept this excellent resolution. "John says Eveleen's unique, and I answer I hope she is. She's made enough misery for two women, anyhow. You have not perhaps the ill-fortune to know the grip she has, or had. I should expect to see half London in mourning if Eveleen died,—flags at half-mast, and so on. On my word, I believe it is her genuine indifference does it,—she never was what I call beautiful at all. She imposes, in all senses. . . . Now I understand," broke out Agatha, still not speaking of Eveleen; "a man making a fool of himself about a fine horse: he gets something for his money. But a woman like that, shorn of brains and principles from

birth, wallowing in comfort at the expense of a first-rate man whose life she's ruined,—no, I can't see it if John does. Perhaps," said Mrs. Ingestre thoughtfully, "I am prejudiced too."

"Anyhow, we are free of her for the moment," said Mrs. Gibbs quietly. "She has gone abroad."

"Won't face her husband," said Agatha. "So they say in the town. She must know what she's done, then,—it's a flat confession. I mean if it's the case she has not been back since the night."

"It is the case. I only hope he is quit of her for good, but I greatly doubt it."

"John doubts if he wants to be," said Agatha dryly.

Once more Mrs. Gibbs fell silent, and set her lips in that self-contained manner of hers. Those who pass through trouble in company grow intimate perforce, and she had got a long way in the Ashwin affairs, much further in all directions than the Ingestres, who, in spite of all, were interested in Eveleen chiefly. Mrs. Gibbs had found Eveleen's husband worth study as well. She had never really known him before, and had herself rather repelled him by her manner. But now they had Violet between them as interpreter, which made all the difference; a common anxiety and a common devotion had united them. Once his shyness was broken, Claude talked easily, and what he omitted from modesty or diffidence Violet supplied.

He had told Mrs. Gibbs, with the simplicity of a decision long-made, that if his wife obliged him to divorce her, not otherwise, he would immediately retire. When she protested, horror-struck almost, as anyone who knew his great reputation would protest, she discovered it was not only his desire, but his dream to do so. His book,—quitted in bulk at the time of his marriage, and only touched from time to time as his professional work grew thicker,—had now lain fallow for years, and his single ideal of happiness was to return to it. He could not bear

consulting really,—Violet told her that, to her equal amazement. Violet informed her, when they discussed the subject, that he spent himself, literally, on personal interviews,—his pulse altered, he had confided to his daughter, during a delicate one. The common human exchange, exaggerated to his sensitiveness, exhausted him more than the most critical operation to perform. No one but Violet had ever had it so stated in words, though a few of the more friendly suspected it. It was the student-nature, forced into the battle against its will; and it was his wife,—the sheer necessity of making a position for her in the world's eye,—that had forced him. Custom had eased it, to a certain degree. Fame had come to sweeten it, to use the trite phrase, as surely as wealth had come. But he loved neither,—it was not, and never had been, the fame of his desire. He had talked of the society who pampered him, for a whole evening to Mrs. Gibbs, with the bitterness of a man who knows himself wasted. And he knew where his talents lay. There is no altering the book-maker, he had said with his slight laugh to her at parting, even though the book is never made. He had a strong persuasion now that it never would be, for all Violet's entreaties. She and Hubert Ford had both promised, with a like ardor, to save him all the drudgery, but still he remained skeptical. Eveleen had entered the lists against that book, and she suffered no rivalry. Eveleen was still in the world—and all was said. It was a singular,—to Mrs. Gibbs most significant,—acknowledgment of Eveleen's power.

Mrs. Ingestre know nothing of all this: nor would she, at that time, have been interested to know; and her companion had no thought of telling her. It was Mrs. Gibbs, after an interval, who returned to Violet.

"I was to thank you for the flowers," she said suddenly. "I am forgetting my commissions, and manners too." She considered a minute. "It is so kind," she

said, "to send colored flowers. Nobody else did. Color keeps the soul awake,—I think that was it. She cannot bear blank things—resignation."

"Thank you," said Agatha. "That's herself: I shall tell John. She shall have all the colors in my conservatory, I know that. . . . Look here, why can I not see her? I shall do her no more harm than the boy."

"I am not sure," said Mrs. Gibbs composedly. "Charles is rather clever. Sir Claude lets him see her for a quarter or half an hour a day, according as she can bear it. He saves up the wildest nonsense to tell her—I think he must have been practicing lately. Charles always did have a taste for romancing, but I never thought he would find a use for it. It is absolutely useful, for she is accustomed to following him, and it does not tire her over much. Besides," said Charles' mother, "she supposes he is happy, for the time."

"Just so," said Mrs. Ingestre. "She was apologetic to your son? Perhaps I should say remorseful?"

"Apologetic is much better," said Mrs. Gibbs. "The finest kind of apology, kings and queens. Charles told me after the first time that he could not bear it, and I saw he could not, so I warned her against the manner. Then she became more careful of his feelings. She probably trusts now she is—excusable, in Charles' eyes. . . . It may be natural," said Mrs. Gibbs, after a pause.

"The manner? It is, John believes. That 'grand air' is, in the rare cases, not a manner of speech but a manner of thought: though it will be banned as affectation," said Agatha, "to the end of time."

"I always considered her a little affected," said Mrs. Gibbs; but Agatha thought she used the past tense deliberately. She was a woman who saved words, and Agatha had been at some pains to draw out even the information she had now collected. But it was, as she expected, the useful information; she had at once, in this quarter, the things she wanted.

She would gladly have talked longer and discovered more, but soon after this, three people simultaneously demanded Mrs. Gibbs' presence in the house, and Mrs. Ingestre, finally worsted in her private quest of an interview with the girl, had to go.

On the doorstep she encountered Claude, who was leaving also, in the direction of his next engagement, and inveigled him, with some difficulty, into her carriage; but in the course of a couple of miles' drive she got nothing of value out of him. The subject of Lisette he treated lightly: the subject of his wife he dodged with an address that, to Agatha's overwhelming curiosity, seemed absolutely fiendish. He did not appear to be aware that all London—Agatha's London—was talking of him, and that it was serious. Serious for the Ingestres, of course, —momentous, since Eveleen was no casual offshoot of the tree. Eveleen's husband remained polite throughout, which was more than could be said for Agatha; and she dismissed him finally from her equipage at the gate of the park with the information that he was hopeless.

"Not yet," said Claude, with a spark of chaffing defiance that told her more than all the elaborate fencing that had preceded it, and went. Agatha, half-offended and half-diverted, went home, considering him.

"He's doing everything for Felicia," she said to John, when retailing the results of these interviews; "admires her, you would say,—but he will not take her seriously."

"What's the young fellow,—solvent?" said John.

"Solid," said Agatha. "Solid all round, Claude says. But he barely seemed to regard Lisette as an element in the case,—hardly as a person at all. He might have been talking of one of his pictures,—rather a good one,—when he alluded to her. He certainly doesn't want to give her up to anybody. His expressions," said Agatha pensively, "were extraordinary. I never know what Claude's at when he gets into that mood, impish and idle. He seemed to say the first thing that came up,—

and the first thing was frequently very good. He evidently did not want to drive in the park,—the crowded end,—looked shockingly ill, and seemed to enjoy the scenery. At least, he made remarks on it when I asked him about other things. Any other man, I should have said he had been drinking. I told him so. It may be simply relief at Eveleen's departure, of course, and Violet's society. But——"

"*But* it is hardly the bearing to adopt to *us*," was what Agatha thought, though she avoided the ill-taste of uttering it in words. Eveleen's family could never quite escape from that attitude to Claude Ashwin, which they had assumed with such freezing effect at the time of his marriage. It was hardly worthy of the man they had allowed to marry Eveleen, to treat her abandonment of his hearth and protection so easily,—if he did; nor to show such arrogant indifference to the question, thrilling all the echoes of Lady Ashwin's haunts in town, as to which of many possible rivals held the field. The fact of her sudden flight, almost unprovided, immediately after her brilliant appearance at the Elkington reception, was public property: and it was hastily assumed, by all those who had Eveleen's dignity at heart, that some man was backing her.

That this shadowy man did not exist John would be sincerely sorry to believe; yet, as he gathered up the evidence on this immensely important question, limping down the steps of one well-instructed authority and up the steps of another, doubts began to assail him that his cousin's dignity was involved. It was borne in upon John that Eveleen was "shirking," and, in private with Agatha, he went so far as to use the term. He had noted here and there about her life that his cousin Eveleen was "slack,"—useless to deny it: and from "slackening" to "shirking" is not really so long a step. Yet between the two, for an Ingestre, there is a deep gulf fixed, not least when what she shirks is the fruit of her

own misdoing. At moments John had a sharp fear, as bad as a twinge of his gout, that Eveleen, oblivious of all she owed to herself and him, would yet drag his name in the dust, as little Lisette, for all her recklessness and misfortune, had failed to drag it. These were anxious moments when they occurred.

"I'd like to take that little girl into counsel," said John at the window, thoughtfully scratching his chin. "She probably knows a thing or two, and she's as sharp as the deuce for an expedient."

Agatha did not suppose he was alluding to Lisette; but she threw copious cold water on his hopes of seeing Violet. So John had to take the remaining alternative, far less palatable, and consider whether at the worst he could lay his majesty aside for an hour or two, drive to Harley Street, and appeal formally to Claude. It had struck John while he stayed in their comfortable house that the man who had married Eveleen, and suffered so freely at her hands, knew her quite as well as he did himself, even better perhaps on certain sides; and he had a curious conviction that, even now, when she had turned her back on him publicly, leaving him a prey to all the flies of gossip he most detested, Claude could whistle her back at will.

Agatha's recent description of his nonchalant bearing in the carriage strengthened this suspicion in John's mind; exactly how, he could not say. Whatever might be said of it from their own point of view, it was not the bearing of a man who had any doubts of his mastery. Besides, Claude had such a tiresome way, in John's experience, of suddenly disclosing his mastery of subjects by no means in the direct line of his life's business,—why not of his wife, who certainly might be said to be? Once more, it was, for Eveleen's admirers, an uncomfortable thought.

"She's got used to him," reasoned John, when they had left the subject and come back to it about a dozen times. "And that means a lot, to Eveleen."

"She has also got used to his motors," said Agatha, "and his money. That means still more."

"She could get them elsewhere," said John. "I've an idea the man's harder to find, and I've an idea that she knows it, *à la fin*. Eveleen always had an unearthly flair for her own interest, at a crisis—look at the way she stuck to her notion of marrying him, in the first place. We didn't exactly give her an easy time. . . . She'll think it out, if he gives her leisure, in the watering-places: she'll have a few other men to look at there. Then it will be a truce, I greatly fear,—with honors to him. All the honors. . . . I greatly fear it," said John, limping about quite nervously.

And John was right. The great house of Ingestre had, in virtue of the ultimate proceedings of Lady Ashwin, to admit flat defeat. It was long,—many years,—before they realized how complete and crushing, in all its bearings, was their defeat at Claude's hands, for he was careful of their feelings; but Eveleen's first action was enough for John. Her own interest became so clear to her, as he prophesied, in the leisure of the various watering-places, that, after lengthy pondering, frequently postponed and interrupted, upon the important theme, Eveleen did an absolutely unheard-of thing,—a thing she had not done for a dozen years. She wrote to Claude.

III

He brought the letter to Violet one spring Sunday morning, as she lay in the idleness of convalescence by the open window of her room. He entered quietly as his manner was, and she did not disturb her peaceful attitude, for she was well-accustomed by now to his noiseless, rapid visits,—observations of her, so to speak, between his other duties,—and to his presence about the room. His tricks were quite unlike the tricks of all her other doctors, Violet had told him several times; but they were not objectionable to the patient, evidently, since she took no account of them.

As he advanced to her side, still without a word, and extended the letter, she turned with a little start. Her faint color just showed as she saw the writing upon it.

"I am to read it?" she said, looking at his face.

"To be sure. It is your affair."

"Mine, Father?"

"Read it," he said simply. "You will see."

She read it through, her color wavering; for it seemed to her an exquisitely intimate proceeding, to plunge, thus unforewarned, into the worst problem of his life; the problem which she had only dared at intervals, and always when he led the way, to touch.

The letter was equally stupid and stately,—stately as she could not avoid being in her superb egoism, her unfeigned indifference to the opinion of God and man. It was that, as Agatha said, that mowed the world down in front of Eveleen; for, poor things that we are, we can none of us avoid the belief, the hope at least, that the truly indifferent have the secret that we look for in vain. It was a confession too; for, in three or four ill-framed childish sentences, she convicted herself, in the effort to clear, of the crime with which he had never charged her. She knew what she had done by some instinct, brute instinct if you will. She had known it long, known it in essence since the night when, having shifted her responsibilities finally upon a girl whom she admitted in words to be unfit to bear them, she left Violet's house.

Having so confessed, she repeated the original offense. She insulted her daughter by the form of her condolences, and could not keep her pen, which followed her thoughts, away from Charles' name. Her chaffing, pleasantly done in life, became incredibly awkward, vulgar and brutal upon paper, at least to Claude's idea; and observing Violet from his station at the window, he saw her delicate brows set once or twice.

Lastly, Lady Ashwin complained,—grumbled. In the concluding portion, she said she was not well,—sleeping

badly. She had seen a doctor at Pau. That was really why she had come abroad,—people chattered about such things in London. She supposed Claude would say he was too busy or something to come out,—though lots of people they knew were there. If he refused to move, she did not see how she could do otherwise than return to London again. She would go to John's, if he wanted. Things in general were a great bore. . . .

"It is mania," said Violet at the end. She used her definite tone, because the thing had become clear to her, and folding the letter neatly, laid it down. "It is far better to admit it, and be done."

"I have long admitted it," said Claude, "but I am not done. The admission does not help."

"I think it helps. Personally, I would loosen you instantly, Father,—it is incredible you should be asked to bear it,—except for that."

"The honor of the profession," he said, with a faint smile, glancing round at her.

She nodded. "The thing before your name, and the things after it. All the things we are proudest of." She seized the hand hanging in reach. "Most unluckily, darling, you can help."

"Most unluckily, I can. I had already thought of it. It was the last of my thoughts, so I might guess it would be the first of yours."

"Is that flattering, or otherwise? I'm afraid it doesn't bear looking into. Tell me what your first thought was."

"What should it be?" he answered, turning brusquely. "You, my love,—and Charles. I have more than once felt guilty towards him."

"You wasted your pains, then," said Violet. "Let us alone, please. We don't want you,—we shall do. You will see, Mother will get used to us as well. It is not insoluble, Father,—there are always ways." She took up the document again, to consider ways, and laid it down suddenly. "You can't leave her like that,—it's

not to be thought of. You must be very happy, quickly, in a scrawl. Mustn't you? It is the only way."

"You think so?" he said, pondering over the lines.

"I do, yes. I am feeling impatient about it,—bad for me. It's *bad* for me, Father. . . . No, give it me again. You know it all by heart by this time."

Once more she went through the thing, sentence by sentence, considering it.

"It is very, very difficult," she said dreamily. "As bad as the most fearful sum. I wish Honoria was here to help me,—but I can see one thing. She is not safe without you, and she knows it. I can't see beyond that."

"You think she knows it?" he asked, laying hands once more, quite mechanically, upon the evidence. It was comical almost, their fine brains beating themselves against those blunt, ill-considered phrases in turn, and returning baffled every time to consult with one another.

"Of course she does. The whole text of that,—the fact of her writing, even,—is a confession of weakness, for Mother. Pitiable,—horrid! She has been alarmed. I am afraid, dearest, whenever the last time was, you alarmed her. You trampled a little, didn't you? You do when you forget."

"Whenever the last time was," he said, "I intended to trample, and alarm her too."

"Oh, did you lose it, really?" She laughed up at him sidelong, her cheek upon her hand. "Lose it quite?"

"All of it," said Claude, "and there was more than I thought. It was all gone before I knew. It was before seven on a cold wet morning, which may be some excuse."

"Had you slept badly,—poor man?"

"No,—*well*," he said vigorously. "That was it. And you had been out all night." His voice grew fierce at the recollection, and he laid a protecting hand upon her as she lay.

"Don't scold me any more," she said beneath her

breath, "for the things I did before I grew up. I really didn't know. I—never should again."

"Would you not?" he said, his fingers caressing her absently. "I am not so sure. You have not grown up so completely yet,—I trust."

"I am very old," said Violet, with gravity,—looking very young. Mrs. Gibbs had tied her hair back in the fashion of her girlhood, which delighted Claude. He had always declared it was the only fashion that suited her, those drooping, nymph-like lines. She had exactly her old elf-look again, as she lay sidelong on the pillow, her cheek on her folded hands. It was a pale cheek still, but it had regained its pretty contour, by dint of Mrs. Gibbs' and Mason's vigorous efforts. The terrible sharp look that had haunted Charles in the first weeks of her recovery had departed, with the other unnatural signs of the long agony, during most of which, as she was under drugs, they could not feed her, only keep her alive.

Now Violet was quite contented with life again, she told them, and enjoyed her dinner immensely. She had found some trees to gaze at, by means of careful searching among the chimneys, and the tulips below her window were looking beautiful, though faded in parts. Charles said they were a disgusting sight from the dining-room, and threatened daily to cut them off with his dinner-knife: but from Violet's point of view they were quite effective still. She had just made up her mind, during an hour of laborious thought, to set white crocuses in the grass next year. Charles said yellow ones, for the sake of contradiction; but she had quite determined upon white ones, with heavenly orange tongues amid delicate shadows when you looked inside. She had also talked at length to Charles about the weather: having refused, at his request, to save it up for Jones.

Now, since her father was with her, and seemed to be thinking, she started the theme afresh, dreamily.

"It's Sunday, isn't it?—it ought to be."

"It is," said Claude, in a tone to match. "You ought to be out, my dear: right out in the country. It is incredible."

"Incredible," said Violet. "It was just as incredible last May, but we have forgotten. I remember a day, a nice one, I drove with Mother to hunt clothes. Mother hunted my clothes extremely well, when she gave her mind to it. We dawdled a little, because it was so delicious, looking at the ducks in the park. We did nothing to speak of before lunch,—Mother is rather nice to do nothing with. . . . Poor Mother."

"Well," said Claude, after a pause, "that means I am to relent to her, does it,—that last remark? Open my doors to her, at least. Forgive her, I will *not*."

"Yes, you will, Father darling: by degrees. Don't speak in that tone, it annoys me." She put a hand over her ear, which was really not visible, owing to the elf-like hair; and once more Claude laid his protecting hand right over hers, ear and all.

"I will *not*," he repeated, less violently. "There are things a man should not forgive. But you are welcome to." He bent to look into her shy gray eyes, which slid sidelong once, and slipped instantly again from his.

"Don't talk to me any more," she said in confidence. "I'm thinking."

"I don't allow it,—not real thinking," he answered as gently. "Give your mind to the sun."

Violet tried this prescription. She thought of the sun for five minutes,—nothing else at all.

"Your book, dearest," she then observed.

"I have thought of that," said the doctor hastily. "You need not. I will write it in odd times."

"You haven't *many*, have you?" said his daughter delicately. She tried the sun again, for inspiration. "I think the best thing for you," she said, in the voice of dreams, "would be to have a breakdown, like Honoria's. A solemn one, for a year. Nobody would be the least surprised, considering what you have looked like these

last weeks. The King would be sincerely sorry,—second or third-hand,—the newspapers would learn of it on good authority,—and the book would get ahead.”

“Thanks,” said Sir Claude. “That is ingenious. But I have my doubts if your mother would approve.”

“Mother would stay with Cousin John, meanwhile. Some of the nicest doctors of your acquaintance would tell her you were much too ill to be disturbed, and she would take good care not to go near you. The nicest doctors would come to tea with me first, Father, just to learn the facts.”

“Milford Angus?” said Claude.

It was a legitimate subject of scoffing in the household that Sir Milford Angus had called to see how Violet was, and had remained to tea with her, and been taught for at least an hour, according to Violet, how to behave. She said, like most intolerable people, he was only intolerable on the surface, and heavily sentimental underneath. How she discovered this interesting fact Charles could not extract from his mother, nor Claude from her. Violet still disliked Sir Milford Angus, as she explained, on principle: but it was too evident that his principles did not prevent him from liking her.

“Can’t you work a breakdown?” coaxed Violet. “Do try. Honoria and heaps of people do it impressively. And after all, you must know better than anyone the way to start.”

Sir Claude did not seem to see his way to a breakdown, however; or rather, he saw his way so well that he could avoid it, and had been doing so for some months past. Doubtless he was thus able to avert other people’s breakdowns with the more signal success during the years of his work that ensued. He looked pensive, to Violet’s eyes,—or rather eye, turned slyly on him through her hair at intervals,—distinctly serious, gazing from her window, but not so miserable as he had on entering. He was possibly planning the development of the book, without the assistance of a breakdown, in an infinite accumu-

lation of odd times. He folded up Eveleen's letter as he pondered, and put it carefully away.

"I wish I could get you out, Puss," he said. "But I suppose, as things are, I had better go myself."

"As things are," said Mrs. Shovell, "it is Sunday: a day of relaxation for the wicked, and rest for the good."

"I am relaxing," Claude assured her. "Shall I read to you, darling?"

"No. I am resting, as you see." She shut her eyes. "But you may stay about, if you want to, and think out some short, really clear sentences for Mother—until Mamma comes in."

Her father laughed, being taken unaware by the conclusion: exactly as Violet had intended him to laugh, so she was pleased. She immensely enjoyed obliging him to laugh, and often planned her sentences in advance with that intent. Her brain was just beginning to move again, and lift her from the inconceivable morass of stupidity which had made her practically useless, from the social point of view, during the weeks gone by. Since they all came and talked to her charmingly, especially Charles, it was humiliating to be unable to produce the smallest sparkle in return. She said "no" and "yes" to their remarks, with great decision: and told them all that they were clever, or kind, as the case might be,—they were frequently both; but she felt she was wanting, at the time: and it was regrettable that she generally thought of the right answers, afterwards, when they were gone.

Thus it was gratifying to be able, even with an effort, to make people laugh again: and the sun in the garden was to be thanked, most probably. It was the only thing worth doing in life, Violet thought at times; especially as laughter, like mercy, is twice blest: and he who presents it, even the smallest smile, among the overpowering sorrow of the world, is lifted out of sorrow too.

So she made them laugh, as had always been her way: and cried in secret, when she was "a fool."

II

MAUD

I

CHARLES always won his bets with Margery,—unless he won them for her, as on a certain celebrated occasion when he discomfited the scoffers by becoming engaged to Miss Ashwin sooner than anyone thought at all probable,—and the wager about Marmaduke Jones was no exception to this excellent rule. In the private interview between Marmaduke and Violet, over the preparation of which Charles spent the most elaborate and unnecessary pains, since it might easily have happened casually, without any pains at all, Jones did not give himself away, but Violet saw through him. The only thing that did not fall out quite in accordance with Charles' benevolent scheming, was Violet's instant humiliation before him, her husband, when this culpable oversight of hers was brought home to her. She dodged Charles in the most unworthy fashion, and compelled him yet once more into a state of unwilling admiration of her natural guile: as shall be seen.

Jones, touchingly innocent, *A* lamb for the shearing, the mere aspect of whom should have made Charles ashamed, called at the hour suggested, at the house of his dreams, and was told Mrs. Shovell was in the garden. Jones had not been aware there was a garden before, but since there was only one way to it, through a green-painted gate, he discovered it without difficulty. He could also, on his emergence into the so-called garden, see all there was of it at once, not to mention all its occupants. Eavesdropping, on this interesting occasion, even had Mr. Shovell proposed it, would have been impossible: even the shameless manner of eavesdropping practiced on the stage would have been difficult within its bounds.

The occupants of this garden, or stage, were three,—four, rather. Mrs. Shovell on her knees,—Jones saw her first,—engaged with a trowel on a border-edge; Mr. Shovell on his feet, his back turned completely to her, and partly to Jones, engaged—very deeply, as was evident—with an extremely pretty young lady, of a countenance vaguely angelic, in walking costume and strong shoes, who was lying carelessly across a deck-chair. The fourth occupant was a young terrier-dog, of Irish extraction, in a perfectly idiotic condition of excitement and hilarity, engaged—deeply in every sense—in frantic researches for a lost ideal, possibly a bone, in every corner of the garden. It appeared, by the subsequent dialogue, to be one of the terrier's mistaken ideals that Mrs. Shovell was replanting in the bed.

"I *am* sorry," said the angelic young lady in the chair, who had tears in her eyes. "He *will* do it. I can't manage him in the least."

"It's only his fun," said Charles, consoling her. "He thinks he's useful, digging potatoes. Don't cry, anyhow, darling."

"He was so funny," said Charles' companion. "It's Violet who ought to cry."

"She will, when we're gone," said Charles. "She never does, in public." Jones was petrified with indignation at the words.

"He's doing it again," said the angelic young lady. "Over in that corner,—I *feel* he is,—I daren't look. Charlie, you really *might*——"

"She'll see to it when we're gone," said Charles. "That's what she's good for, making the best of a bad job, you know."

"You?" said the young lady. "Poor Violet! Charlie, don't be a goose."

Exactly in what manner Shovell was a goose Jones did not see,—or want to, since it was too evident by his tone that he was flirting outrageously. His own appearance,

at that juncture, broke the scene short, and seemed to put both the actors in it out of countenance, as was natural. You would have said a bucket of cold water, at least upon Margery and Charles.

"Er—how are you, Jones?" said Shovell, rather formally, with a face of gloom. "Violet——"

"Oh, what a comfort!" She had shot in front of her husband before he could look round, and, trowel in one hand, laid the other on Jones' arm. "I am sure you know about dogs. Would you *terribly* mind calling that little dog of Lady Brading's, at *once*? She can't manage him, and Charles is afraid. It does look like rabies, but it's only youth,—and being such a heavenly day, I do feel for him. But——"

Her dramatic hand showed the devastation: a row of springing sweet peas laid low.

Now Marmaduke was not only an amateur gardener of the frenzied description ordinarily known among Surrey residents, but the owner and trainer of several most orderly young dogs: thus, quite apart from everything else, he must instantly have vowed himself to her service. But beyond that, she appealed to him personally as a "comfort"! And beyond even that, she was pale, and her lovely eyes piteous, and her voice tragic even to exaggeration,—and her husband carelessly devoting himself to another girl, who was, too evidently, laughing at the catastrophe! In all these accumulating conditions to drive a simple man distracted, all Jones could do was to take nine steps,—which exactly brought him to the end of the garden, dodge that terrier-puppy, seize him with one skilled hand by all his loose skin,—which means most of the dog, as the friends of puppies know,—extract from his dripping jaws a half-gnawed lily-bulb, and bring both bulb and dog back to Mrs. Shovell, to deal with as she should think fit.

"Do beat him for me," said Lady Brading, handkerchief in hand. "I so hate it,—and Charlie is afraid."

Their accumulated insults had not the faintest effect on Mr. Shovell, who was looking on at Jones' efforts with a complacent smile: much as though Jones was his property, and was behaving rather neatly on his trial trip, as Charles expected.

"Come along, Margery," he remarked, when the puppy had not been beaten, "don't slack about. We have leagues to cover ere set of sun, not to mention a train to catch in eleven minutes. By the way, I haven't introduced you, have I? People get up, to be introduced."

"I needn't," murmured Margery,—but she rose.

Of course, neither Jones nor Lady Brading had the slightest need of an introduction, beyond the mention of the name. Everything of that sort had been done in advance. Margery knew everything of note about Marmaduke through Charles,—more than she wanted. Jones knew all that was necessary about her, namely that she was Shovell's stepsister, and Mrs. Shovell's first cousin on the father's side. Her name had been flung about during the railway journey from the West, when he compiled, quite involuntarily, Violet's family history. Of course, if she was a kind of sister, it justified Shovell's manner to her more or less,—even the way he was holding her arm. Besides, her soft eyes were seraphically innocent of all wrong, and when Mrs. Shovell insinuated her hand into the other arm, she shook Charles off at once; so Jones forgave her, by degrees. He tried not to listen to the girls' conversation, but owing to Charles' rapt admiration of his stepsister, and the view, and anything but Jones, he heard it all.

"Come back and see Maud," said Mrs. Shovell in confidence, straightening Margery's tie, which hilarity in the chair had discomposed. "Charles told you she was coming, didn't he? Isn't it breathless?"

"It's miraculous," said Margery, and her tone was awed. "How on earth did you do it, darling?"

"I am really not quite sure," said Jones' hostess, still

in earnest confidence. "I think it must be what Charles calls a conjugation of the stars. She refused me twice in the autumn, with absolutely no excuse. The fowls are *not*, you know: they would lay their eggs tidily, just the same. They couldn't help it, since Maud has brought them up and taught them manners. Nor is the fact that Maud has no clothes,—that is a *reason* to come and see me. Now it's the third time,—just like a fairy-tale,—and she is coming! Maud is to rise on London to-night."

"The Maud will rise in the extreme west," said Charles in the background, "paralyzing the astronomers."

"I could never get her," said Margery, "even for a night. Excuses wasn't the word. She suspects snares, even when Bob is away. When he's at home, of course, she thinks we shall take her to Court every day, and ask the Prime Minister to meet her. It's a real miracle, Violet,—just like you."

"I simply stared at the post-card," said Mrs. Shovell. "I thought I must have overlooked a negative somewhere, but Charles looked too."

"Bet you she'll be prevented at the last minute," said Charles in the background. "Take either of you two to one."

"Charles doesn't want her," said Violet. "He says I can't want looking after any more, and he is sick of female fusses, and that it's rot. Those are some of the things he says. But, of course, *unless* Mamma had said that to Maud about my necessitous condition——"

"Exactly," said Lady Brading, nodding secretly. "She knows her."

"She may, of course, go straight back to Glasswell by the evening train," said Violet, looking piteous, "when she finds how exuberantly capable I am. I shall have to put it on, I am afraid, a little. Only if I do, Charles will instantly give me away. That's the worst of him lately,—he calls it nerves. I can do what he calls the sofa-trick beautifully, though the bed-and-breakfast has

got rusty a little. Yet I think, for *Maud*, I *must*. Don't you, Margery? Just one morning, to cheer her."

"Do, darling," said Margery earnestly. Jones noticed that her seraphic eyes were very tender, as she clasped the slighter girl.

"It is only the *début* that matters," said Violet, "to get her well-planted, like a pea. After that, Maud will grow nicely in my drawing-room, for weeks."

Jones listened to all this, astonished. It was not the presentation of Maud that astonished him,—he knew all about the lady. She was Lady Brading's sister, the elder Miss Gibbs, the daughter of a clergyman in the country, somewhere in Kent, Jones believed. It was Mrs. Shovell's references to herself that astonished him, for, personally, he thought she was looking far from exuberant,—hardly even well. It was true, she was not wrapped in a shawl, as he vaguely expected, and reclining with languid eyes fixed on nothing particular in the distant landscape,—her eyes were very bright indeed, and she spoke with her accustomed neat rapidity. She was not even,—he noticed it with a nameless thrill,—wearing mourning. Shovell wore the badges of sorrow in their simplest form, but she was welcoming summer in delicate gray. There was not a touch of black on her from head to foot, unless her own dark hair: for her little feet were shod in a dusky color, the color of peaty soil, that made Marmaduke think at once of the velvety sweet-pea seeds he had been putting in the earth that morning. Margery remarked on them too, just before Charles dragged her away.

"Dear, what ducky little shoes. Where do you *find* things? I should never think of shoes that color——"

"Which is why you don't find them," moralized Charles, pulling at her gently. "Shoes the color of every woman's thoughts are to be found in London,—stockings too. You never saw anything like her stockings——"

"Will you be quiet, Charlie? He's too awful, isn't he, Mr. Jones? That's the way he's going on, I expect, and I shall be quite helpless."

So Margery, still protesting, was practically lifted out of the garden by Mr. Shovell, in the direction of the train they must have missed. Jones was certain he was too familiar, and sensitive witnesses must be pained; but, obedient to direction, he went with the pair to the gate, listening to their intimate converse all the way, and carrying Lady Brading's puppy by a section of his voluminous scruff. The puppy had exhibited a strong inclination to stay with Mrs. Shovell, or at least in the neighborhood of her seedlings and her peat-colored shoes. Jones understood it very well, and he drove the puppy on the path of duty with marked benevolence before he returned himself to her side.

Charles and Margery, as eventually appeared, missed the train they wanted, but caught another, which proved to be the one they should have taken. This was illustrative of the way Charles went through life, fortune assisting him at every turn. They had a thoroughly delightful walk, and thought themselves extremely clever into the bargain.

Between Marmaduke and Violet, left on the grass together for two hours and more, nothing happened of any moment, except in the inner workings of her mind. A great deal happened there, as usual; but we do not intend to weary the reader with it, since it was very quiet and private thinking, as usual, at top speed. Jones, close to her as he was, saw none of it; and yet he saw every detail of herself and her doings, all the time.

It was not what is called a confidential dialogue, though easy, as their talk had been from first meeting, with the ease of natural understanding and mutual trust. On all the essentials of life and living, these two extremely dissimilar persons, man and woman, were at one. They knew it so well that they barely touched upon essentials, ever. They talked of passing things with their tongues, as people do, and their spirits conversed meanwhile. He did not commiserate her even; he could not, when the other lively pair were gone, and, sitting near her, he saw

the expression of her face. The effect of anguish and sorrow on a young face is to add no lines,—she seemed to Marmaduke in many ways younger than ever; perhaps because she had been obliged to submit to compassion and assistance,—to lay, at least for a period, her anxieties in other hands. But for all that, sorrow's seal was there; whenever her mouth lay still for a moment, he saw it clearly,—not the weak thing resignation, but the proud line cut by grief. And lightly as she chattered to him, doing more than her share of the entertainment, as usual, and smiling readily, the shadow of sorrow's close acquaintance was in her eyes.

He saw her eyes rarely: for she was sitting parallel with him, and during the pauses of their talk she was reviewing the beds in front of her. They were talking of gardening, since she had instantly tracked down his fad. He was boasting—all gardeners boast, even Marmaduke—of his country triumphs: so it was natural that a Londoner should dream. The hopes of that season for a town garden were already over. Little would come in any case, Violet knew, of those seeds the puppy had disturbed. But she did not want, she assured Mr. Jones, to be reminded too frequently of her limitations and the fate that was in store.

"You are *right*, to discourage me," she assured him crisply, at one point. "You mean extremely well. . . . But remember, please, I am living my first year. I never had any garden at all before, to ponder about. The first year, you make silly plans,—and hope for impossibilities,—and learn by black experience." She lifted her gray eyes once to the chimney-pots, and dropped them on the beds again.

Jones was silent, incapable of speech. Who could have answered that?—the hopes of a first year: and yet she was simply talking of her flowers, no shadow of other complaint. It was Jones who complained. What "silly plans" had she not made, for that first child? Whither

had her deep thoughts, her delicate imagination, not conveyed her? What, even to his knowledge, had her fingers, those lovely little fingers clasped about her gray skirts, not prepared? Jones knew all, he knew far too much,—and he could only pray that, as ever, she would speak again and save his utterance.

She did. Slipping from flower-land by a natural progress, she talked of Lisette. She told him, rather shyly, how pleased she and her father were at his idea; and she praised Lisette, as she had praised the flowers, with words of which Jones could never have thought; words which suggested color, reached the velvet texture of life, like the incomparable touches of Ledger's paint-brush on the ivory. And then she said,—he was sure it was herself speaking, not Sir Claude,—how well it would be for that boy to feel he had a name and a father, from the first; and how he might be saved by Jones' proceeding from the bitterest grudge a human soul can bear, a grudge against the unalterable laws of society; and from that viler thing, a dim resentment, never failing, strengthening with his own strength, against his mother's weakness.

"I'd thought of that," said Jones. "I mean, I'd thought of it more or less. I think I could do it all right,—see that he never knew, I mean. Of course, he'd take the name."

"*And* she's so lovely!" said Violet, as a climax to all, relapsing into her chair. She shut her eyes, as though to see that remembered loveliness.

"Yes," said Marmaduke, looking at her.

"In short, I congratulate you," said Mrs. Shovell, opening her eyes again, and sitting up unexpectedly. "May I?" She held out her hand.

"It's awfully kind of you," said Jones. "I haven't asked her yet, you know,—but I'm pretty sure."

"So is Father," said Violet. "He's horribly penetrating. You needn't be afraid."

Thus half Charles' bet was safe,—the negative half. For, at that swift crisis, quite unforeseen, her presence close to him, her joy in his supposed joy presented almost tangibly, and her delicate hand in his,—Jones did not lose his head. He barely blinked under it: and he answered her in a string of his accustomed platitudes, unmoved.

After that necessary formality, they settled to nothings again,—contented equally to have disposed of it, since he was awkward, as she was shy. Jones rose to leave at last, for he was sure he had tired her sufficiently; and if the elder Miss Gibbs was coming, as she had said, to early tea, one person at a time was quite enough for her, and she could rest in her long chair, and shut her eyes at her leisure, between.

When he was quite close to her, taking his leave, and she least expecting it, he said—

“Mrs. Shovell——”

She turned her head and looked up, for she had not risen. He colored, but not much.

“Miss Lisette gave me a message yesterday. I ought to have told you sooner, really. It was about those little baby's clothes.”

“Yes?” Her eyes were leveled steadily; only, she seemed helpless to rise, as she had intended, and lay, her clenched hands beside her. Jones' eyes avoided her, but he saw it all.

“She is not clever at sewing, so she can't copy them, she is afraid. But she will keep them to look at a little, and give the maid an idea. Then she will send them back.”

“Why?” said Mrs. Shovell, biting her lip. “Don't they fit him? I chose the big ones on purpose,—I had got well ahead.”

To be sure she had, she would: she had dressed that dream-child of hers for six months in advance, he was very sure.

“They said he was so splendid,” she pushed swiftly

on, looking about her, not at him. "I haven't seen. So I sent the last set for him. Only the littlest, the first I made, I kept."

One hand was clenched, up against her breast,—he knew that sensitive gesture well. He was discomposing her terribly, shaming her,—angering her for all he knew: but it must be done.

"She can't," he insisted. "Can't take them,—no girl could,—least of all her, and now. Big or little, you must keep them, stick to them all. Shovell——"

"It's my work," she said, in a flash, "not Charles'. Every stitch is mine."

"That's what she hadn't thought of," he said, "—Miss Lisette. The maid told her it was shop work,—couldn't be yours. That's where the mistake was, really."

"Then there was a mistake." She was upon him. "Who undeceived her?"

Taken aback, he could not answer; but of course she saw, in a flash of her bright eyes.

"What made you think I had made them?" She flashed at him again. "Why can you not let Lisette take happily?—Lisettes always do. Do you think I did it without considering? Do you know how I thought while I made them, Mr. Jones? Since she wants them, and I don't now, why not? I had sooner some child wore them,—I had sooner, it is not pose."

"Some child will." He did not say it, but it was in every line of his face. His face was not ordinary at the minute, it had a man's full share of feeling. What he said was:

"It's beastly cheek of me, Mrs. Shovell. I'm afraid you're vexed."

She was. She lost her temper completely. She said half a dozen keen things in succession, ridiculously like Claude. Only Marmaduke hardly knew Claude at present, and respected him too much, in any case, to draw such comparisons. She flew at Jones, and pulled him

all about with her indignant tongue, the flag of outraged susceptibility still in her face.

It was Violet's opinion that, before a girl had accepted Mr. Jones, it looked something like presumption, on his part, to manage her like that. Lisette might refuse him,—very likely would. She was not used to being lectured, and had a particular abhorrence, having been brought up by a holy aunt at Torquay, of pietistic sentiments. . . . Her own instincts, to Violet's ideas, were extremely pretty and delicate, quite as likely to be just as better people's second-hand exhortations, with perfectly accurate quotations at intervals. Personally, Violet did not care for that either,—it was a matter of taste. . . . Mr. Jones was very much mistaken if he thought he could work on Lisette, or ever make her much different from what she was. He had better be warned in time. Quite superior people Violet could think of, in Lisette's neighborhood, had not even tried that,—knew it was better not. She had a heavenly little nature, of which it was possible for persons who lived by mere catchwords, as somebody or other said, to be densely oblivious. (A pause, with bitten lip, to see if Mr. Jones would resent it, which he did not.) In matters of that sort, he would have done much better to leave two women alone: that is, unless he enjoyed hearing the truth from one or the other,—as she could not but trust he had heard it, from her cousin, already.

In short, it became clear to the meanest intelligence, in the course of these remarks of Mrs. Shovell's, that Jones was quite unworthy of Lisette.

Of course, if Violet had realized how fascinating she was when she lost her temper she would not have done it: but in the nature of things, she could not pause to think of that. She was at a terrible mental crisis,—rather alarmed at the situation, to tell the truth,—and had to relieve her desperate feelings somehow. When she stopped, breathless, and looked about her at the garden,

Jones was glad, in one way, it was over; but, since he had lost the straight gleam of her eyes, almost wished she would start again. That clean cutting of the Ashwins, though it might lacerate at the moment, never rankled. Jones was deeply pained at having offended her, as he thought; but he remained standing by her, erect though submissive; her ill-treatment had not yet driven him away.

After a pause, she got up, and, of course, he followed. On her feet Mrs. Shovell turned stately,—magnificent to a degree. Jones had never seen this before, though Charles could have warned him of its existence. She walked with him to the garden door, and so to the gate: pale again, very cool in her gray clothes, stepping daintily on her peat-colored shoes, holding her head on her little neck with the loftiness of the whole line of her Ingestre ancestors, making an occasional correct remark,—and thinking, had he known it, passionately in between. The effect upon Jones was appalling, far worse than the first phase of her anger, and he felt he had lost her for ever.

But still, he did not regret. Come what would of it, he could not let Lisette assume all, all to the bitter end, even the dreams of her fingers, as she sat sewing and thinking, that whole winter long. It was just the straw too much, even for Jones' charity, that. He was absolutely, obstinately sure that he was right, even if she quarreled with him.

She did not. On the door-step, at the very outpost of her territory, to which she had thus shown him with the aloofness of a queen, she relented. Quite without warning, she changed again. She leant on the gate, and with a glimmer of mischief, just discernible, gave him an invitation. Marmaduke, astonished and overcome at such sudden forgiveness, such an unforeseen relapse from the Alpine heights of austerity to their first and most ancient comradeship,—for she jested as she spoke,—accepted instantly, without stopping to consider if he had an en-

gagement for the night in question. (Eventually he discovered that he had, and lied to the other fellow, instead of telling the truth to her.) Mrs. Shovell said that it was a great relief to her to be sure of him, and Charles would be so glad to be let off dressing, if Mr. Jones could bear it. Jones, venturing to be faintly amused, could bear it very well. Whereupon Mrs. Shovell, still leaning on the gate, made half-a-dozen rapid remarks about nothing particular in the street before her, all of which struck Jones as rather funny afterwards: said she hoped Mr. Jones had not really taken her seriously, ever, since it was not worth it, and people who knew her never did,—and vanished from him up the steps into her own house in a flight.

As to this last remarkable and undignified piece of behavior on Mrs. Shovell's part, Jones did not take offense at it, or regard it very seriously even, because, unlike all the rest, he was used to it. It was part of his memories, and the best part. During her honeymoon, on days of mental exaltation, or under the influence of a sudden happy idea, she used to fly about like that: take Shovell from the rear sometimes, and nearly knock him down before he brought her to her bearings, so to speak. Shovell had always stood it well, uncomplaining, as though it was part of the job he had undertaken in marrying her, so Jones accepted it likewise. Yet it was peculiar to her: he had never noticed any other young lady—married young lady—do the same thing; so it had gone down among his more sober memories of that unequaled holiday unaware.

II

When Charles and Margery came home, dirty but serene, they found Violet in her accustomed place in one corner of the sofa, sitting demurely with her hands folded, in reach of the tea-tray. Two cups on the tray had been used, and Charles looked at them with suspicion. Obviously, if Jones had prolonged his call through tea-

time, either Violet had failed to see through him, and the bet was waste paper, or, having found him out, she had been encouraging him deliberately, which her husband would not like to think of her.

He pointed to the two cups, mutely, with a certain marital severity.

"Maud," said Violet: the one word. She seemed to rouse from abstraction and refrained from turning her eyes on Charles. This looked rather well for the bet, so Charles melted.

"Marmaduke gone, darling?" he said lightly. "Was his conduct all we should expect, or otherwise?"

"All you would have expected," said Violet. That was bad. A third and fearful possibility struck Charles, that she had always known, and knew now that they were waiting for her to betray herself. Feeling the need of support, suddenly, he turned about.

"Maud's come and Marmaduke's gone, Margery. Are you ever coming in?"

"I can't stop," called Margery. "I'm only putting the flowers in a bath for Violet."

"Delicious," called Violet back. "What have you?"

"Quite indescribable," said Margery. "We dragged up a whole wood,—I did, that is. Between that and the dog, I'm black from head to foot. Charlie wasn't the least assistance, with either. He only stood about, quoting Shakespeare, while I struggled."

"How did he get black, then?" asked Violet, as Margery, unruffled and angelic as ever, entered with the "bath." "Just holding on to you?"

"Scandalous," said Lady Brading in confidence. "And the things he says,—he's far worse than he used to be."

"Just what I told Mother of you," said Charles, eating. "Have some cake." He looked at Margery with meaning, and winked the eye that was nearer Violet.

"No, I shan't stop," said Margery. "She has had quite enough nonsense. Her eyes are tired."

Charles took, or tried to take, an observation of Violet's eyes. He was just too late.

"Maud has gone to her room to unpack," said Violet to Margery. "She says she always does it at once on arrival, when she has had a cup of tea. As she has never arrived anywhere before, I did not see how she could argue it; but I let her alone, carefully. She told me to sit here till she came down, with this silk thing over me: so I did. And not to try to do anything else: so I didn't."

"How long," Charles demanded, "was it between Marmaduke's departure and Maud's arrival?"

"Twenty-five minutes, dear. Why?"

"You didn't go to sleep, then?"

"To sleep? No,—why should I?" She glanced at him, and he saw her eyes. All Charles' airy spirits awoke and sang. The bet was won,—she had been crying! Then, all his airy spirits sank again. Brute that he was,—she need not have been crying about that!

"Come and see Maud soon," said Violet, as Margery bent over her to say good night. "And bring us Bobbin."

"Don't!" muttered Charles, just audible. After a minute, as Lady Brading did not move, he grew impatient. "There's that brute squealing, Margery," he said. "You'd better go."

For some reason, it was not tolerable to Charles that Margery should pity Violet. He was inclined to defend her angrily against the pity of all the world. Pity, indeed!

As his stepsister, urged by a meaning tug, turned about, he spoke instantly in his ordinary tone. "Do I conduct you to your carriage, darling?—I forget. Do I do that for the baronet's wives, V., or only for the baronesses?"

"You sit where you are," said Margery, "and finish your cake, and try not to be a donkey. I am sure she does not want donkeys to-night."

"While thou my amiable cheeks do coy," murmured Charles. "And kiss my fair large ears—I say, good thing Brading's not here, isn't it? Ripping good cake this is of Alison's. Mind if I bring it out?"

When he came back to the drawing-room from speeding Margery, and resumed the cake he had left behind him,—for Charles' bad manners never went beyond speech, even with his sisters,—Violet was in the same position, the kettle was boiling furiously, and Maud, he much feared by distant sounds, was about to descend from her room. Really, with one's so-called relations prying at every turn, a fellow never got any privacy. Charles advanced to the tray, and with the exertion of huge effort, blew out the flame.

"Lot of good you are in a house, V.," he then observed: and dropped, cake in hand, by her side on the sofa. "Why," he inquired in confidence, "does the infernal thing still go on boiling, when I've put out the flame?"

"Because infernal things do," said Violet. "It's the heat." She relapsed into reflection. She looked tired and disheartened. Charles began to wonder, with vague resentment, what the little beast Jones had said to her. He also reflected that it is singularly useless making bets if you cannot enjoy winning them. He was pretty sure he had won.

"Have some cake?" he ventured soon.

"No, thank you, dear: I've finished." But, recognizing the overture, as she always did, she laid her little clenched hand in his palm, which lay open invitingly. Hers was rather cold: but since Charles was radiantly warm with food and exercise, that could be remedied. They were at this perfect moment of opening confidence, and he was sure he would soon have had her talking to him, confessing to him, admitting (possibly) his superior wisdom and knowledge of men,—telling him all sorts of things besides, her heavenly thoughts, which he longed to know,—when Maud came in. Is a man not justified in declaring such as Maud superfluous in the world?

"Charlie dear," said Maud, and kissed him. Both his stepsisters did this frequently, and Charles had no objection. Broadly speaking, they were nice girls to have

about: pleasant, soft of voice, thoughtful for others, and both far above the average in looks. Maud was nearly as pretty as Margery, really, and though a little older than Charles, and seven years older than her sister and Violet, had not yet touched the barrier of the thirties. In her place, in short, Maud was excellent and even ornamental, but Charles thought Violet was wrong as to her place being here. It was clearly with the chickens, at home.

"You might get up, lazy," said Violet. "It's not as if we had Maud to stay with us every day."

"By the mercy of heaven," said Charles' expression. Nor did he get up. He could not, since Violet had trusted him, temporarily, with her hand.

"How do you think she looks?" said Charles carelessly.

"She would look much better, to my mind," said Maud, "if you let her have all the sofa. That is how I left her. That is what I advise."

Of course she did: sure to advise the most repulsive course conceivable. Charles leant back, elaborately at his ease. He was the master of this house, after all. He sought subjects to distract Maud's attention.

"How's Mr. Shepherd?" he inquired. Mr. Shepherd was the curate at Glasswell,—Maud's one hope in life, according to Charles.

"For the minute, I hardly know," said Maud, considering. "He had rather a bad cold on Friday, and I took his boys. He is away for the week-end, staying with her family. I was telling Violet how glad we all are. Her family are presenting Mr. Shepherd to the living. Isn't it nice?"

Well, if this was the tragedy of Maud's life, she was certainly disguising her feelings very well. That was just like Maud, disappointing everyone's kind hopes for her, and pursuing her private way with a smile.

"Do you like London, Maud?" said Charles, having reviewed such openings as remained.

"A very heartless question, poor darling," said Violet, "considering that no one met her and made her comfort-

able. I made our excuses, Charles,—each with a visitor. It was unlucky.”

Had she expected that of him, thought Charles, amazed. As if unmarried girls could not always, in these days, shift for themselves! And as if Margery were not ten times more interesting company!

“If *you* had come to the station, Violet,” said Maud quietly, “I should have been extremely angry.”

“Rot,” said Charles in haste. “She’s all right now.”

“She looks better,” said Maud, with a critical glance. “I didn’t like her looks at all when I first came. I was surprised a little, Charles, to find her alone.”

How had Maud found her, he wondered.

“That’s because a bore came to call,” he explained. “She couldn’t get rid of him,—you can’t always. She was telling me.”

“She told *me*,” said Maud, “she had had a beautifully quiet afternoon, sitting in the garden. You can imagine which of you I believe.”

She was really rather severe. Charles began to consider possible sops for Maud.

“Margery’s got a dinner and theater-party on Monday,” he remarked. “Rather a jolly piece, I’ve seen it. Do all right for you, I think. Margery didn’t exactly leave a message, but——”

Violet’s hand gripped his.

“It’s all right, darling,” she said soothingly, to Maud’s startled face. “The party has been made up for months. They haven’t possibly room for you, and Margery is terribly sorry. I was to tell you how terribly sorry she was.”

Maud’s face grew more tranquil, though still nervous. She could not bear big parties, and noisy festivity, and going out. Nobody ever understood the point to which she could not bear it, except Violet. Violet was quite safe. That was why Maud had come to her, partly: partly because Maud was, by birth, one of the daughters

of consolation, who are drawn, as though by a magnet, towards suffering, however quiet and well-disguised.

Charles, disappointed of the opportunity of getting rid of Maud, for at least one night, was consoled by listening to the ensuing conversation, for Violet had been aroused. They talked like girls, of all kinds of odd things, personal details, chatter of Maud's parish, news of the family, news of the family animals, carelessly exchanged. Any girl can play hostess to another girl, of course, but Violet did it differently. Charles watched Maud's face, nervous to begin with, and saw the look come over it that he knew in people who talked to Violet, softened and amused. She roused on her side, smiled, answered with mild drollery, and Charles began to forgive her. But he still wished she would leave the room: because, among other things, he wanted to find out, for poor Margery's sake, about the bet.

In a long, comfortable pause, during which Maud could easily have got away, with an easy excuse, to fetch something, she produced instead a piece of knitting from a black silk bag, and settled contentedly in a low chair. Charles, his eyes cast down, manoeuvred to capture Violet's other hand, when an interesting point of Maud's work should give him the opportunity. The trouble was, like most good knitters, she did not seem to be dependent on her eyes.

"Maud, dear," said Violet delicately, moving a little away from Charles, and breaking the silence, "you wouldn't be worried by a small, home dinner-party tomorrow, would you? Sunday supper,—nothing formal, you know. As small as possible, naturally. I am not seeing people much."

Charles looked round surprised. It was true she had not been seeing people,—rather rigid about it. This was a new departure.

"Are you sure you can stand it, dear?" said Maud.

"Quite. It would be a nice change. I do so want to introduce you to a friend of ours," said Violet. "A Mr. Jones."

"Of course I shall be delighted," said Maud, with propriety. "It's sweet of you to think of it; but you really oughtn't to bother about me. What's the matter with Charlie?"

Charles, who had gaped during Violet's delicate opening, had at the conclusion collapsed in ecstasy, a sofa-cushion pressed passionately over his face to conceal it. There he remained, gasping, for some minutes. When the cushion dropped, still in a collapsed state, and looking quite anguished, he spoke in a weak tone:

"She'll put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes. Forty minutes?—ye gods! Give her twenty-five."

"Don't mind him, dearest," said Violet to Maud, who looked puzzled. "That's the way he talks, sometimes. He has taken to reading Shakespeare lately, and it goes to his head. I always thought Shakespeare a dangerous author, didn't you?"

Her face was turned towards Maud as she explained, but her eyes were sidelong upon Charles, watching him with an apprehensive gleam. She trusted,—she did trust,—he would follow her tactics, and not give her and her nice new-built castles away. He must see the necessity of remaining quiet, at least till Maud went upstairs to dress. Maud was a very peculiar girl: delightful, but entirely exceptional among Violet's acquaintance: and, since Maud was an Ashwin, Violet knew her very well. If Maud thought Mr. Jones was being thrown at her, suspected it even, she would never, never consider him. And Violet did want her to consider him, and save him, if it could be done, from himself, and this frightful mistake he was committing—*now*—in marrying Lisette,—Lisette, of all girls in heaven or earth,—out of charity! Charles must see!

Charles did see, by degrees, thinking it over, in a continual and contained ecstasy, at Violet's side. It was so like her,—so exactly "her style"—to solve a situation which had embarrassed, alarmed, and made her miserable, for full five and twenty minutes' painful thinking, just in

this way. Perhaps even for less,—he could not guess how quickly she had done it, after Marmaduke's departure, but there were the results. A new plan, a palace rising on the wreck of the old, a most unassailable castle in Spain. Charles' critical mind attacked it on every side, quite fruitlessly. The more he thought, first of Marmaduke, and then of Maud, the more he saw the instinctive art of it. They were made for one another: every point was right. It was a thousand times better than Mr. Shepherd, who had really been, Charles now admitted, an infernal ass. It was only as Maud's one chance in life that anyone had thought of the curate, since she would not see people, pay visits, and so get a chance at other men. And now, if Violet sent her back to her parents, engaged to Jones,—with his motor, and his money, his country tastes, and his blameless record!—it was simply too glorious a last chapter to the narrative—almost too good to be true.

"He will still be our cousin," breathed Charles between his teeth, his eyes dancing, as he lay prostrate, his discarded cushion slipping towards Violet, and Violet's hand, with half her arm, drawn towards him under that convenient cover. Mrs. Shovell appeared to hear nothing, looking pensively upon Maud, her guest. She drew from Charles as much as she dared, and only when he absolutely hurt her, frowned at him. She knew he wanted to bear-fight, very well. His blue eyes, carelessly admiring as they were, had a dangerous spark. She had laid herself open to teasing, naturally,—violent teasing,—teasing without end,—but if Mr. Jones and Maud were happy, and Lisette, her pearl of pearls, held high above sacrilege still, it was worth it, a thousand times. Violet's pale face was triumphant, in spite of all, and her elvish little pointed chin tilted in defiance of the scoffer. She was shamed,—rightfully shamed, since Charles had seen through him, and she, idiot that she was, had not,—but she was not defeated, yet.

"What's Charlie talking about?" said Miss Gibbs presently.

"Whispering,—it's very rude," said Violet. "I have a great deal of bother with his manners still, Maud. I think you girls spoilt him, down at Glasswell."

"Hasn't he any work?" said Maud, looking critically at her stepbrother's attitude. Now this was the Saturday before Whit-Monday. It seemed to be Maud's idea that men always had something in hand, like women, at all hours of the day.

"Lots," said Charles. "And, by the way, Violet, there's a metrical point I want to ask you about, in that text. There are two or three readings to choose from. Mind coming to the study a minute?"

"She certainly won't stir," said Maud briskly. "I'm surprised at you, Charles. Texts, indeed!"

"Not your sort of texts," said Charles. A pause. "I say, V.," he said presently. "Maud would like to see her room, wouldn't she?"

"I've seen it," said Maud. "It's absolutely sweet,—much too good for me really." Maud had the same room as Miss Addenbroke, the Wrangler.

"I want to talk to Violet, privately," remarked Charles.

"You want to worry her," said Maud. "I know. I am replacing Mamma, and I don't intend to leave Violet at your mercy."

"My mercy! Cheek! Maud, you beastly—spinster——"

"Charles! How dare you?"—hotly, from Maud's hostess.

"Maud,"—Charles tried once more,—"when you come to stay with married people——"

"You forget I live with married people," said Maud. "I know just what to do."

"She means my mother and her father," said Charles, to Violet. "That's what she means."

"Well, they're married," said Maud.

"Doubly," said Charles. "I mean, each of 'em twice. But that's not the point."

"Papa and Mamma have not been married so long,"

said Miss Gibbs, turning her knitting. She looked at Charles. "When did you first come to the house, dear, I forget. About——"

She was interrupted. "When did you first come to *my* house?" said Mr. Shovell fiercely, sitting up. "About an hour ago. And you can't leave the room, when I suggest to you, in a series of delicate hints——"

"Delicate!" said Violet.

"—That I want to discuss the details of a nice dinner-party in your honor to-morrow, with my wife, out of your hearing."

"That's what you want, is it?" said Maud. "Why didn't you say so? Shall I go, darling? I really ought to write home, and I expect you should be resting properly." Her tone, on the last phrase, changed to the tenderest sympathy.

"There are writing things," said Violet, "in that corner by the door: and stamps in the littlest box behind. If I were you, dear, I should bring them over here. That corner's so draughty."

Maud looked at her stepbrother in quiet triumph, as she passed the sofa to the corner indicated. As she returned from it, with Violet's desk and the littlest box of stamps, she remarked suddenly,—

"Charles, if you don't leave her alone this instant, I shall put in a postscript to Mamma."

III

"No, darling, you do not," said Maud, when Violet tried to make the coffee after dinner. "You can tell me, from the sofa, exactly what to do." She took the things out of her hands with mild decision. Maud was always mild as milk, but decision was not the word for her.

"You are so unlike our last guest, Maud," said Violet, from the distant sofa, gazing at her. It was odd, indeed, to remember Honoria Addenbroke, across that gulf of time,—six months,—and look at Maud Gibbs, tranquilly making the coffee.

There was something faintly old-fashioned about Maud, pretty and daintily finished as she was. It may have been the arrangement of her hair, which she had never changed since she was seventeen, coiling it neatly round her head: or certain time-saving formalities of the same kind in her dress, at least by day. At night, Maud just escaped the puritanical, and let the world discover that she was not entirely blind to her own attractions.

"I shall not do anything to your clothes," said Violet thoughtfully, "at all. You know your own style, and have the sense to stick to it. I should only dreadfully like you to have a few more, darling. Just one really nice one, to take back with you. We might shop to-morrow morning,—what do you say?"

"There would hardly be time in the morning," replied Maud. "You won't be getting up till eleven, at least."

"Shan't I? How tiresome. I mean, how nice. However," said Violet dreamily, "there are weeks before us."

"Two," said Maud. "Papa will want me later in June, for the farm."

She meant, for the farm accounts. Maud was not a milkmaid, though she would have made a very pleasant one: and her father was a beneficed clergyman, though in June he worked in his fields, in an old straw hat.

"There's my bridesmaid's dress," Maud pursued on the former theme. "Nothing could be sweeter than that. I shall wear it to-morrow night for your party. And the pendant Charlie gave me goes with it, naturally."

"But, darling," protested Violet. "I have been married a year."

"I have only worn it once since, all the same," said Maud. "I am sorry, love, since it is your invention, and fitted me so beautifully: but really, at Glasswell, one's nice things never see the light. . . . You may have a little coffee," Maud added, thoughtfully pouring, "with a great deal of milk in it, like that. Now, as it is horribly hot, I shall cool it for you, with a spoon. Now, drink."

She had come to the sofa, and knelt down holding the

cup. Violet laughed a little before she drank, but she followed directions. This was Maud's way when anybody had the least pretension to illness: and Maud considered Violet ill, whatever she or anybody else might say about it. Maud noticed the nice little maid, Annette, agreed with her. She was assured by Annette that Madame did far too much, and did not repose herself, or make herself served, sufficiently. So Maud and Annette instantly formed a compact, and hatched a plot: and Violet was, for the period of Miss Gibbs' visit, very delicate.

"You haven't quite finished it," said Maud encouragingly. "Drink it up. You shall think wise thoughts afterwards."

"My thoughts are far from wise," said Violet. "I was only wondering whether——"

"You mustn't wonder," said Maud. "Whatever it is is quite all right. Annette and I have seen to it. There's a good girl——"

She withdrew the empty cup and put it aside: but she still knelt where she was by the sofa. It was long since she had seen her cousin, whom she loved, now with the admiration of a simpler nature, now with the protection of an elder sister. Maud could talk much more freely to Violet than to Margery, for reasons which all excellent elder sisters will understand: She had "mothered" Margery, with sedulous propriety, from the moment when her own mother, in her last illness, put the charge in her hands, to the moment when Sir Robert Brading relieved her of it solemnly on Margery's wedding-day. Duty entered all her thoughts of Margery,—towards Violet she had no obligation at all. It was a case of independent, voluntary, rather audacious discovery on Maud's part,—and that made all the difference.

"Don't those young leaves smell heavenly?" said Violet, reaching to a tapering branch of the bathful standing in the grate. "Margery brought them in. You and Margery carry the country about with you, did you

know? It's simply all over you, in the nice way you speak, and think, and among your hair. Do you remember at Glasswell, how Margery liked the red clover best, and you the white? Well, that's just all the difference between you. I would *much* sooner have you than a Wrangler, Maud."

"You oughtn't ever to have nasty visitors," said Maud, stroking down her hostess's hair attentively with both her hands. Maud—for Maud—was being very foolish, it may be mentioned. She was seldom like this at home,—had not shown a spark of such fancy since her cousin Miss Ashwin had stayed there last. "That's how I like it, over your ears, like it used to be at night when we slept together. Now you are nice little Violet,—give me that other hand."

Mrs. Shovell did, and Maud very carefully took off her wedding-ring, slipping it on to her own finger for safety.

"There," she said. "Now I can take care of Charlie, and you are perfectly free. Doesn't it feel nicer, really?"

"Much," said Violet, blinking. "Thank you, darling. These are, beyond question, the most tactful attentions I have received for a long time. You are extraordinarily unlike a Wrangler. Do go on."

"There isn't much else to do," explained Maud. "Except to take that necklace off,—you weren't rich enough for pearls at Glasswell; at least, you pretended not. You pretended to be just the same as we were, except when you forgot. Margery and I always loved it when you forgot, and used to look at one another and laugh. You are really terribly, terribly grand inside, and if you had been anyone else, would have thought us dull. Luckily you were not anyone else, and you still are not, though you have married Charlie. Margery has changed utterly, but you are the same. Margery is hardly my sister now."

"Oh, my beloved," murmured Violet, "don't say so. It's only the baby makes a difference, for the time. Perhaps if——"

"No," said Maud. "If would have made no difference, with you: and don't talk about it, or I shall cry. Besides, you are not married, darling: I have got your ring."

"Is it all dreams?" said Violet.

"All dreams." A long pause between the girls. "Violet," said Maud presently, "do you know you never talked to us of that. Nearly all the girls we knew talked stuff about men, and jokes they hadn't any right to make. But you never mentioned it. Were you shy?"

"There are other things," said Mrs. Shovell, her eyes turned aside.

"Heaps of people were in love with you even then, Charlie says," said Maud, beneath her breath.

"He flatters himself," said Violet, with an elfin gleam. "You need not believe him on the subject."

"Everyone thought you very kind to take Charlie," pursued Maud. "I noticed that at the wedding. No, don't talk, it is sleepy-time. Of course, I should never tell him. . . . Your neck is really much prettier without the pearls,—I shall put them round your hair. No, I won't," added foolish Maud instantly, "because that will disturb the baby, and she is going so nicely off to sleep."

"I am not the least sleepy," said Violet, half-opening her eyes. "Have you really nothing more to say? It is all so interesting."

"No," said Maud. "It's only just excitement, at being really in London at last. It feels so strange. I hated coming up to-day, and leaving them all. I cried in the train."

"Are you afraid now?" said Violet, not showing the least surprise. She knew that Maud had literally never slept away from home before.

"No. Because, you see, I thought I was coming to a married-people's house: but now I find it's only you and Charlie. You are in every corner of the house," said Maud, laying her soft cheek against Violet's, "and espe-

cially in my bedroom. You put yourself there on purpose,—I know. I shall sleep with you to-night,—again.”

“Never again,” said Violet.

Her eyes were closed, as she spoke in the voice of dreams; so Maud, hoping sleep was catching her, for all the little line on her brow, did not answer, or comment, and silence fell.

When Charles came in, Maud was still by the sofa, sitting on a cushion on the floor, with Violet's right hand in her possession, having returned the wedding-ring to its place on her left. They made an excessively pretty group, with the delicate background of young beech leaves, and the mist of Margery's hyacinths behind: and it would have been a very jealous and ill-conditioned man indeed who would have wished to uproot Maud and disturb it.

“She's asleep,” said Maud, very low. “Yes, you may: but very carefully.” Charles did, as permitted. He rather liked Maud,—some unmarried girls, anyhow, were not hoydens. Maud was not a hoyden, and he had a very good mind—but not the instant after Violet. It would do at bed-time. He patted Maud's smooth head.

“Read us a fairy-story, darling,” said Violet, her dark lashes lifting for an instant.

“Oh, lovely, Charlie,—do,” said Maud.

Charles had a new book of fairy-stories, as yet unbound, which his firm were compiling, lent him to criticize professionally, but which he was inclined to enjoy childishly instead. He had found several old friends, and several delightful new ones. They were all very simply told, since the book was for children's hands,—“none of your folklore rubbish,” as he said. He had brought the book in with him, to use it as work or pleasure, whichever seemed the more appropriate, to his wife, and his wife's guest.

He had a pleasant voice in reading, and he used, for the

childish fancies he dealt with, the right tone. No one could have failed to laugh, or thrill, or tremble, in the right places. He had a natural instinct in such things, as even his critical father-in-law admitted,—the great, slight things, needing taste and a light touch, which Claude called “lyrical.”

So he read, and they listened,—and with them listened a little ghost. It was there, for Violet first, and but a little later for Maud, and not at all for Charles the reader, as was right. He thought of his reading, not his audience, real or ghostly. He was enjoying himself, as the listening child would have enjoyed. It was that that gave the episode its perfection, a perfection granted to certain moments of our haphazard life, and which must, with the personal inspiration, have the local inspiration behind it as well. Maud, who never forgot the scene, fresh and striking to her mind, as all was fresh, this strange night she was sleeping far from her own, felt the twofold influence keenly.

“It is a heavenly house,” thought Maud. “New, but all lovely,—solid. It is clean,—there was a horror, but they have swept it right away. She has swept it,—he could not. She has done it all alone.”

She looked at Violet’s tranquil, tired face, and added, in the demure recesses of her little maiden mind:

“I should think hers is the right way to be married—if you must.”

IV

“Miss Gibbs,—Mr. Jones,” said Violet. “This is all of us. It is really terribly kind of you to come.”

Jones did not feel kind, and he certainly did not look terrible. He looked so absolutely decorous and unpretending, that Maud’s shivering spirit was immediately reassured: and this quartet of Mrs. Shovell’s originating started, from the first, in excellent tune and complete accord.

Jones, hardly to his surprise in this house of constant marvels, found himself in a new room. Violet had told Charles with decision that Mr. Jones would be more comfortable in the study than the drawing-room; and since it was their ordinary custom to occupy it on Sunday evenings when alone, Charles had offered no objection. On the contrary, indeed, since by this means the party need not separate into its elements, according to the absurd British custom, after dinner; and the girls could continue to save Charles the trouble of talking to his guest, as was indeed, in the guest's interest and that of Maud, most desirable.

Charles' study was the best room on the ground-floor, and should by rights have been the drawing-room; only Violet had given it over to him because the view, approaching to the pastoral, on to some ten square yards of grass, was so nice and inspiring for him. It had some of its owner's personal oddities about it, including what Violet kindly called his Cambridge toys; but the aspect generally was inviting, with comfortable chairs, a spacious hearth, and a window opening straight upon the garden-path, so that the poet could stroll beyond its bounds if the muse exacted it.

There was another spirit in the room besides Charles' muse, for those who felt such presences: since the study, for want of space elsewhere, housed Mrs. Shovell's grand piano. Charles did not feel it, naturally, since he was out at work when she trespassed regularly on his precincts, and the discreet echoes, sleeping among her husband's books, never betrayed her. As a fact, Violet occupied the study nearly as much as Charles did, and studied in it, perhaps, rather more than he. The speculation need not be pursued for the present purposes. However it may have been, the atmosphere of these masculine quarters was sympathetic to both sexes, and Mr. and Mrs. Shovell used it, for the most sociable hour of the working week, by common consent.

Maud and Mr. Jones did not make friends instantly, of course; they were both far too correct. Violet had to talk to him at first, since Violet was his hostess, and his first acquaintance as well; and Maud merely added a word in season, and a pretty smile. But their eyes discovered one another at every discreet opportunity, and they plunged into intimacy on one of their innumerable common subjects after dinner. The talk throughout that nondescript meal had hovered, seemed to settle, distracted itself again owing to Charles' enfantillages, and then veered in the right direction. After dinner, owing to a chance allusion of Violet's, a prominent interest of both came uppermost, and Maud and Mr. Jones joined forces.

Then, and not till then, having leisure, did Mrs. Shovell look at Mr. Shovell, and allow him to scorch her with such mockery as he would. She clasped her hands about her knees and faced him serenely, high above criticism, since really the thing defended itself. It was one of nature's works of art, not hers. There was Maud, and there was Mr. Jones, both busy and benevolent people in their own spheres and parishes. She was pretty and sensible, and he was nice, and rich. Where could be the harm of their meeting for a pleasant evening's chat like this? They were both, quite obviously, enjoying it so much. They were already such excellent friends.

Friends! That was the crucial question of the evening: the definition, extent, and exact limitation of that most fugitive word. Charles himself had quantities of friends, of every variety and description, so that he was evidently the person present fittest to judge upon the case. He judged, very much at his ease, blowing smoke-rings pensively in his favorite chair. He and Violet had been friends before their marriage; at least Charles thought the word would do. He imagined, since he had a vigorous fancy, and full leisure to make the effort, that he had once looked at Miss Ashwin with intelligent appreciation and respectful curiosity, even as Marmaduke was looking at

Miss Gibbs. He was pretty sure Violet had looked non-committally well-disposed, and gracefully attentive, as Maud was looking at Mr. Jones. In the subject they had in hand,—which did not interest Charles much, though Violet was listening closely while she sewed,—they seemed both very eager to impart their personal experiences (he remembered that, in his own case) and each capable, at moments, of anticipating what the other was going to say (Violet had more than once done so, he recollected). It was a liberal though quiet entertainment, for Charles, from the heights of married manhood, to look down on these young people's efforts to place themselves in life. It was lucky for them they had *his wife's* encouragement and support in their undertaking,—very. He hardly thought they would ever have brought it off without, even granted a casual meeting in somebody's comfortable but untidy study, and with somebody's cook's thoroughly good supper to cheer them first. They were both so ridiculously diffident and shrinking,—a thing which Charles had never been, even when he proposed, for the fourth or fifth time,—he had really forgotten which,—to Violet Ashwin in Maud's father's Rectory in the country.

Just about there in his reflections, his second cigarette gave out, and he found he had used his last match. Turning to complain to Violet of this unheard-of trick of fate, and get her to suggest places where matches might be lurking, and so spare disturbing Jones' promising romance, he found her wrapped in the contemplation of Maud, who was wrapped in the contemplation of a blue pamphlet Jones had produced from his pocket: and Jones,—of all impudence,—wrapped in the contemplation of her: Charles' wife, not his stepsister, as was expected of Jones. Just at that minute, perhaps owing to the annoyance of the match problem, Charles found that it wouldn't do. Someone must throw a bomb and blow up that condition of things, anyhow: so he threw one.

"Won't one of you girls play something?" said Charles. "Jones, have you got a match?"

The bomb went off admirably. Everybody started, and then everybody spoke. It was really quite an amusing experiment.

"She'll do nothing of the sort," said Maud absently, from the pamphlet.

"Awfully sorry, Shovell,—in my other coat," said Jones.

"You have stolen both my downstairs boxes, though I marked them," said Violet patiently, and rose.

She rose, of course, to find the matches for him: he did not really expect her to play,—nobody wanted music. Charles did not, at least. But Jones rose too, instantly, looking at her with dog's eyes of service,—ready to run and fetch those matches from any corner of the house, and return with them, wagging his tail. Or to open the piano, of course, if that was her gracious pleasure: though, since he was the only guest, he dared not presume she would.

"He will see one of your boxes on his own writing-table, if he just takes the trouble to turn round," said Maud reposefully from the pamphlet. "Dear, of course we should love it, but are you sure you really ought?"

"I have hardly found my fingers," said Violet, who seldom went through the forms called by the French "making herself prayed." "You can all go on talking while I find them; do you mind? I shall only remember some little tunes, most probably."

Marmaduke sat down again, flushed. He and Maud, with the blue pamphlet between them, followed directions. They settled into talk again, more seriously than ever, low-toned as well, a genuine *tête-à-tête*. Charles, having found the matches, very cleverly, in the place his step-sister indicated, wandered about the room, toyed with his precious texts a little, watched Violet for a time with mild amusement, and then, since she did not seem inclined

to give half her attention to him continuously, as he hoped, moved on. Having opened the French window a crack, in obedience to a sign from Violet, he was tempted by the early-summer savors entering, went through it, and out into the air. This was the cleverest thing he had done yet, since the night was warm and balmy, and those girls inside obviously did not want him about. Maud was wrapped in Marmaduke, and Violet in music, for the time. Nor could Marmaduke get at Violet, while music had got all of her. Her music was one of the things that cut Charles out, but at least it cut other fellows too. That is, unless the other fellows, like that freak Ford, insinuated themselves into the musical ring that enclosed her, and made themselves offensive by talking to her at great length on subjects which Charles did not understand.

Thus a considerable, and for Charles a most contented, period passed. When Violet's little tunes, which had grown into rather long ones, ended, he supposed he had better come in and see how Marmaduke and Maud were getting on. The state of things he found in the study was most encouraging. They had got ever so far; Charles' tactful diplomacy in leaving them together was justified, and Violet's idea of playing to them had evidently been not half bad. Music is known, if it does nothing else, to buck up people's spirits and make them feel agreeably sentimental. Violet's little tunes had had that effect on Charles in the garden: he had thought of all sorts of things, in a pleasing and melancholy vein: and got the lines of a sonnet straight that had plagued him for some time.

Jones' affair with Maud,—it really had assumed the dimensions of an affair,—had come straight as well. They understood one another, and looked one another in the eyes. Maud was a capital girl, really, and was looking extremely pretty in her bridesmaid's dress, and Charles' own pendant: and he was proud of her, and it. Jones was an uncommon good little fellow, and looked ever so

much the better for his delightful evening in Charles' house, and the company of the nice girl he had provided, not too good for him, but good enough. He had the means to marry on, too: more,—about twice as much—as Charles had when he claimed Miss Ashwin. Maud, on the other hand, had about a quarter of her cousin's dowry, but then she was a girl of excellent stock. The Ashwins were quite a decent family, though of course the Shovells and Ingestres flew a bit higher, according to the heraldic estimation. As for the Gibbises and the Joneses, Charles did not pursue the point. It is perhaps as well for Mr. Shovell's dignity that he did not pursue it, or put himself out to chase into the mists of antiquity two such excellent English names.

"It is awfully good of you, Mrs. Shovell," said Jones, still slightly pink: alluding to Maud's company, or to the tunes, or to the dinner, or all three.

"Mr. Jones has made a lovely plan, dear," said Maud, who was looking quite lively, and seemed to have lost her shyness. "He wants to fetch us to-morrow afternoon, and, if you feel up to it, drive us down to Leatherhead to see his garden."

The deuce he does, thought Charles: he knows how to make the best of his time, the little beggar! Charles was almost offended, in the person of Jones' patron, host, narrative-compiler, and bear-leader in general, that he should have presumed to take so important a step as this without being prompted by him, or at least by Violet. He pinched Violet's arm, by way of a general indication of the line to take. She was to accept, without laying too much stress upon it, naturally: to accept laughingly, in a fashion she could manage very well.

"I hope I shall be able to," said Violet. "It is almost too nice an idea, I mean, to come true."

All three looked at her hastily, for her tone was tremulous, and found she was very pale. Maud, with a glance at her new friend, slid an arm behind her cousin incon-

spicuously. Jones, without a moment's hesitation, said good night in his most ordinary voice, and took his departure. Charles,—since Maud could be trusted,—went out with his visitor to the door.

"She'll be all right," he said, since the little man looked so unhappy, as pale as Violet almost, all his new-found prosperity spoilt. "She oughtn't to have played so long, probably. She forgets, and lets herself go, when she plays."

"Oh, yes," said Jones: raging internally.

Why had Shovell let her play, then? He, Jones, could not have stopped her, while she was blessing their ears,—Jones' ears, it is enough to mention, were Welsh,—with her heavenly melodies, gathered out of every corner of great art. Even had he found the will to do so, he could not have ventured, after the way she had crushed him yesterday. Miss Gibbs, though a kind-hearted and charming girl, was thoroughly unmusical, and could not have heard, or interpreted had she heard, that passionate pain. Only her husband, knowing her as he ought, sensitive as he should be to imaginative beauty, since he dealt in poetry, could have acted, stopped her, saved her from herself, and them from this fruitless self-reproach.

Marmaduke left the little house in Livingstone Gardens unconsolated, and unforgiving. One had too much even of such nice fellows as Shovell occasionally. Shovell meant well, as the world says, but he did not think enough. He had not been trained to see the needs of others, he merely called attention to his own. He took far too easily, on his side, what she offered, on hers, with pain: nor recognized, Jones believed, the worth of what he took. She,—Jones failed to correct the pronoun in his mind to-night,—she was giving constantly from her private store, waiting for him, schooling her fierce little spirit to attend on his. He abused her kindness, obviously, in slight ways the bystander could see: perhaps in ways less slight of which the bystander dared not think. She

deserved more, much more, than Shovell at his best could ever give. It was doubtful if the man could be found to give her her deserts,—but Marmaduke, at least, would have attempted it.

Jones knew well enough, of course, on leaving her house that evening, how he stood towards her; but he was much too angry for the moment to be ashamed, or even abashed, by the discovery. The shock was his awakening: the shock of seeing her pale and shaken like that, her little sentences, so dear to him in their completeness, disjointed, her lofty pride failing, her delicate voice faltering, her purposes, even for their good, at sea. All within reach of him,—and he not allowed, by the unjust heaven he served, to catch her, comfort and console her as he could,—as he believed he could,—since nature had made them near in heart and soul.

He went home, and raged all night, like a man, not a conscientious automaton: for there was a man in Jones. But his purpose, long set and deeply rooted, of serving her in the only way his unjust heaven had granted to his inherited ideas, was not shaken, not seriously shaken, even then. Passion, in the end, turned to obstinacy in Jones. The closing of one path,—to his mind, the final closing,—only drove him headlong down the other. She had offered him long since a work that he could accomplish, not quite completed yet. He was a singularly tenacious person.

V

“She says it was silly of her to play, dear,” reported Maud to Charles, when she came to him from the upper regions later on. “And she was temporarily asphyxiated because you forgot when you went out, and shut the window; and she will try smokelessness and solitude, and you are not to think about her, and that’s all.”

“How do you like Jones?” said Charles, when he had ceased thinking about Violet, encouraged by Maud. “Nice little shaver, isn’t he?”

"He seems to me unusually sensible," said Maud.

Good!—Jones would probably tell his friend the curate the same thing,—that he had met an "unusually sensible" girl, at the house of "some people he knew." And the curate, having experience of Jones, would draw the correct conclusions.

"Keen about useful things, and so on," said Charles, who had now put most of the sonnet on paper. "You seemed to find enough to talk about, anyhow. Didn't find him a bore, I hope?"

"Not the least," said Maud, standing pensive by the study chimney-piece, and examining Charles' toys upon it. "I wish I was musical."

"Why?" said Charles suspiciously. It would be more to the point if Maud wished she were married. With himself and Violet constantly before her eyes, that was the sentiment that would have been really creditable and timely, on Maud's part.

"I always feel so stupid with people who like music," said Maud, "when I don't. He knew what all the things were she played. He doesn't play himself, but he has subscription tickets to all the concerts, and gives them away when he can't."

Charles considered whether this personal detail, supplied by Maud, a mutual friend, need be added to Jones' narrative as a note, and decided not. It could not be of the least interest to Jones' readers.

"He never knew she did before," said Maud. "It's funny how lots of people don't know, even with her beautiful little hands. Mr. Shepherd said he could have guessed by her hands, once, when she played to us at Glasswell."

What, Charles asked his gods, was Mr. Shepherd doing in this conversation? Maud seemed to be growing careless of their kind plans for her. She had far better stick to Jones,—Jones being, in the latest edition, since the demise of Mr. Shepherd, that is, her one chance in

life. Violet was coming into the business a little more than was quite necessary, too.

"What did you talk *about*?" said Charles, growing impatient suddenly.

"Her, chiefly," said Maud. "We got on to Glasswell and all sorts of things by the way. I hope Mr. Jones wasn't bored too dreadfully, but I simply can't talk music and clever things. I would if I could."

One more long pause. It needed all Charles' celebrated skill as compiler and annotator, to extract, from Maud's commonplace and careless remarks, what really had occurred between her and Jones. They could not possibly have talked about Violet, with a blue pamphlet between them, all that time. To start from their hostess, as a common theme, was perfectly natural. But——

"Did you tell him about the hens?" said Charles.

"A little," said Maud. "He was interested in the garden chiefly, because he loves his own. I should like to see his garden," she added, with a touch of shyness.

"I'll take you down to-morrow, if she can't," said Charles, with a supreme effort for Maud's good.

"Oh, dear Charlie, how nice of you! But I am afraid Mr. Jones would not like that at all. We had better wait, as he suggested, till next Sunday."

"Maud," said Charles warningly, "Marmaduke Jones is very fond of me. You have no idea the friends we are: always were, from the first."

"Goose," said Maud, tweaking his hair. "Why didn't he ask you, then? He must have known it was Whit-Monday, and you were free."

"Maud," said Charles, with the effort of real despair, "do you know you are being, indirectly, rather vulgar? I can't believe that you *mean* to imply what you do."

"Imply?" said Maud, opening her eyes. "I don't know what you are talking about. You're doing all the implying, if there is any. He likes Violet a lot better than you, or me either, that's all I mean. He says she has

been most fearfully kind to him,—and I said he was not the first to discover it. If you can't speak up for Violet to people, I can,—and I did. He quite agreed with all I said, or at least he seemed to. Of course, he was listening to the music."

So that was what Maud meant by sensible! Sensible!

Charles gave Maud up finally,—her ideas were not his,—and went to Violet to complain. Violet's ideas were his, or at least they generally seemed so. He found her still trying the effects of smokelessness and solitude, wrapped in one of the crisp white things Charles liked, curled among cushions on the long chair in her room. She was not asleep,—far from it. Her eyes were brilliant, though she blinked, protesting, when he turned up the full light. But he left it so, for he needed to observe her rather closely while he talked. She looked very white still, and, Charles regretted to observe, rather wicked: at least, as soon as her bright eyes reached his face. But she attended nicely to his complaints of Maud, for whose frivolous and unsatisfactory behavior she, as Maud's chaperon, cousin, and fellow-woman, was responsible.

"When we do all that for her——!" was Charles' line. He had adopted the whole plan in Maud's interest as his own: with some justification, since his had been the motive force, during the evening, in pushing it through. Violet had only played little tunes, in the distance, and studied her cousin, now and then, with close and affectionate interest.

"I'm sorry," said Violet calmly, her chin propped on her hand. "I thought you saw it was hopeless when I did. I really gave up before I began to play. Exactly when you asked for the matches the tail of my last hope was vanishing."

"Really?" said Charles sarcastically. "Why?"

It was exactly at that moment he had surprised Jones gazing at her so earnestly.

"Not him," said Violet, penetrating all his thought, and putting a hand on his arm. "He would do it in time, I think, with proper attention,—not from me. He has only got rather—rather a habit of liking me, if you understand. Please, dear, *don't!*—It's Maud."

"She likes him," asseverated Charles, generously refraining from torment, since she physically shrank.

"Very much; they are thoroughly in sympathy. Charming people both; it did me good to hear them. As keen one as the other, aren't they?—they match well. It would literally be a good match, Charles,—academically."

"What do you mean by academically?" said Charles.

"Oh, in committee. Clever people, like you and me."

"He's comfortably off," argued Charles.

"Quite. Not that Maud or Uncle Arthur would think of that."

"And just the right age for her,—he's thirty-two."

"Beautiful," said Violet desolately. "It's a moral against the committee, isn't it? Since naturally, in the nature of things, it can't be done."

"*Why*, you little—caviler?"

"It's not him she wouldn't look at,—it's anyone. Nobody believed in Mr. Shepherd at Glasswell, really: he was only a playful consolation. Can't you see her little quiver and crescent? She'll be friendly, though always frightened a little; but if anyone tries to catch her,—*gare à lui!*"

"*Rot!*" said Mr. Shovell, with immense vigor, turning. "What do you know about quivers and crescents? You go to sleep."

It struck him, at the moment of speaking, how well the crescent would look in her dark hair. It was she, not Maud, who should have carried it. She had the wild woodland air, this evening, precisely; half-tamed, if at all, Charles would have said. Her eyes, after the first keen glance, had been shy of him; and when he swung round on her suddenly, she shrank away.

"My distaff is downstairs," she murmured deprecating.
"I am talking about Maud."

"Go to sleep," growled Charles, and turned his back again. He let her go to sleep for some three minutes, moving restlessly about the room, among her familiar possessions, and feeling discontented. Then he broke out:

"She's better than I thought, all round. Talks well, when she finds her line: looks awfully well, upon my word. If you dressed her a bit, she'd be good enough for anybody. She knows when to laugh—only about one girl in six knows that—you don't"—at a sound behind him. "She—she's inviting. She's attractive. Any fellow would——"

"Yes, but any fellow won't," said Violet. "Maud's a darling, I quite agree. I could venture even further in her praises. But I had forgotten her a little, all the same, or I should have known better than to lay snares for her. That's all. Luckily she leapt over it,—they do."

"Who do?"

"Those tunicked people. I remembered as I watched. She just slipped round quietly, and made friends with him in our despite. It's lovely to be like that," said Violet earnestly. "Don't you think?"

Charles did not think. And his whole bearing protested against her so thinking, though he could not, for the moment, find words for his surging sentiments.

"You wanted her to be married yesterday,"—the sentiments resolved themselves finally.

"No, no. I wanted her to console him,—and so on. I even think she may have, a little. I hope so,—she was so sweet."

"Did you happen to notice his face when he left?" said Charles:—and then regretted the saying, for she winced again, and turned her head from him. "Don't you want her to be married?" he pressed obstinately on.

"I want what she wants, exactly. I love her, dear."

Her tone was shaken a little, and she pushed a hand in his direction. It was a plea to be spared examination, but he would not read it so. He felt she was evading him, slipping through his fingers, and that is vexatious.

"I had not considered her enough," she repeated, endeavoring to make it clear. "I had hardly thought of her at all. I was—a little at my wits' end—seeking expedients, if you understand. So I was commonplace unconsciously, and I thought Maud would do. I thought I could *use* her," murmured Violet, her eyes dreaming in wonder over the vision of Maud she had invented: Charles was convinced she had invented it, while she lay half asleep in her smokeless solitude lately. She had been weaving forest fairy-tales, and the pleasant and practical Miss Gibbs had slipped in as the heroine of one of them by an oversight; that was all.

"I did her a horrid injustice," finished Violet, settling sidelong among her cushions. "And I beg her pardon,—her goddess's. Dear thing." She shut her eyes.

"What do you mean by an injustice?" The examiner nailed her. His tone suggested that he had her now.

"Oh, haven't I explained? I am so tired."

"No. I don't care for the word. Why unjust?"

"Unjust to the type," she suggested, sliding a glance at him.

"Oh," said Charles, stopping. "Er—yes: I pass that answer."

"Thanks. I did try so hard. May I go to sleep now?"

Having taken note of her expression in detail, he came quite close. "If I had had you in my class ever," he remarked in confidence, "and you had looked at me like that, I'd have——"

"Please!" she gasped, recoiling. It was impossible to say if she were really frightened, or feigning it, she feigned so well.

There was less doubt of his vexation: but he held her

now, at least, so far as hands may hold. He had taken her ear between his fingers when he threatened her, having discovered it with some difficulty among the cloud of hair that was slipping down her neck. He continued to hold it, standing over her, while he thought things out at his leisure.

The fact that Violet should support,—nay applaud,—her cousin in these unwomanly cranks displeased him; since she was not only his for better for worse,—distinctly for his better, so far,—but had led on young fellows like Jones, to mention no others Charles could think of, to look at her in an absurd and dog-like fashion, as though inviting her to use them as a mat to walk over, when she stepped about her rooms. It is pure pose, Charles considered, to crack up quivers and crescents, the regalia of the maiden Artemis, and the airy joys of the unmated, when your proceedings in the paths of life bear any resemblance to the above. She might be doing it simply to vex him, of course,—divert attention from her sins,—she looked a very sprite, crouching from him among her cushions, and almost as white as her white clothes,—but that made things no better. She was enchanting his eyes the whole time, which made things, by the same reckoning, rather worse. He had not seen her in this wild phase at all, since the early days of her engagement, when she had, of course, been able to escape him and hide some of it, though not all. He suspected she wanted to escape him now, and he tightened his grasp unconsciously.

“You are hurting me,” she said faintly at last. “And making me so nervous.”

Starting from his selfish reverie, he looked down, and his hand dropped at his side. There were tears in her eyes, real tears, such as he had never seen there; for, bravely as she had spoken, the first time they met after their loss, he had not seen her weep. Why, Charles had not asked himself then, nor what upheld her,—since he

knew. He was not so dense, where Violet was concerned, as to fail to follow that. She had blamed herself for his disappointment: and knowing it, he had succumbed to that still pride of hers, shown her his own suffering,—allowed her to console. Wordless and witless he had been throughout that memorable interview, helpless under her steady leading, all expression struck out of him while he listened to her little tone: but not because he had not felt it, been thrilled by it to depths of his being unstirred by life before. He was not such a pitiful trifler, whatever the women might think, as that.

He stood rigid, recollecting; and the color ran up his face.

"You are not angry about it, are you, Charles?" she asked, mistaking the attitude. "Not really? I did my best to remedy it, patch it up, you know,—but it was too late." She sought still to speak lightly of the thing before him, but the effort was growing beyond her. "I was a fool, of course,—a young fool: I am sorry. Please don't be really angry,"—her voice broke utterly at his brusque movement,—"no, no!—nor the reverse! I cannot bear it—will you not see?"

One hand was up, defending, in panic almost, against her breast; the other outstretched to him, most expressive of her need. It might have stood, that instinctive gesture, to represent the higher demand of woman on man, throughout the centuries.

She was apologizing, he realized, in all sincerity: apologizing to him, and for the second time. For the second time he had allowed her to get in front of him in that fine competition, the mutual courtesy of intimates, pain in her eyes, and words of penitence upon her lips. Now, as then, it was not, for a strong man, a tolerable position. He was on his knees in an instant, before she had finished her broken appeal: shamed, scared almost, that he had dared to frighten her, to scoff even for a moment as the vulgar scoff, at the pledge she had re-

deemed so finely, the faith she had carried through very fire unscathed.

"It's all right," she gasped to reassure him, as he bent his head low to the fingers of the little guarding hand. "I never cry—in public. I knew you would—be kind. I played too much, I expect. . . . It was rather a fearful five and twenty minutes yesterday. It hurt me dreadfully to-night,—his face. I do like him, he is so good,—a great little man. One would not choose to hurt a man like that. . . . I thought it could be neighbors, you know,—if I thought at all. I was a— young fool then, Charles. I played the dirge of all that, for women, to-night."

VI

They all went down to Leatherhead, Charles as well; and Charles took Maud under his especial charge, and was charming to her as he had rarely been,—as charming as he commonly was to Margery; and Marmaduke and Violet went on, some way on, in front. What Jones called his "little place" was extremely pretty, and by no means little,—rather large. There was cover in it for eavesdropping, too, to any extent, but Violet's husband did not attempt to take advantage of it; and when he and Maud finally did come up with the other pair, Jones was showing Mrs. Shovell the myrtle-cutting he had brought, like herself, from Cornwall on a certain occasion, and which, having received from the first the right attentions, aspects, and etceteras, had grown exactly three times as big as hers in the greenhouse at home; and Mrs. Shovell was refusing absolutely to look at it, with wide, reproachful and attentive eyes.

Jones was really very glad the curate had refused his invitation to tea that afternoon with "some people Jones knew from town," because Shovell, when he was really "on his day," was infinitely better company. Jones had not seen him in anything like such form since the Cor-

nish time, and he only wished he had thought of asking him originally, and saved Mrs. Shovell the trouble of suggesting it. His ready response to the suggestion would have disarmed a very Othello: and Charles in any case would have played that personage badly. He was far better as Bassanio, or possibly Bassanio's boon companion; since nothing, not even the determined drops of rain at tea-time, could allay his "skipping spirit." Marmaduke and Maud, laughing just sufficiently at the proper intervals, were simultaneously surprised at him; and Maud's eyes, if not her tongue, made apologies to their host for her stepbrother's futilities, when necessary. Maud's eyes met Mr. Jones' very frequently, for they found themselves constantly in agreement over almost every point that came up. She also made the tea, since she could not possibly allow Violet; and any man with a grain of imagination could see her planted there as a permanency, among Mr. Jones' roses, making it for his guests.

At parting, Maud hoped very much that Mr. Jones would come over to Glasswell some time, and see Papa's garden there, which some people thought rather nice; and Mr. Jones' concentrated fervor in accepting the invitation was such that Charles' hopes leapt up again, in spite of Violet. But alas!—it soon emerged that Mr. Jones had merely seen the Rectory garden, Glasswell, illustrated in a weekly magazine, and wanted to observe the tomato-culture under glass, or something equally unromantic. As soon as he discovered Miss Gibbs was attached to that garden, and those tomatoes, he could have started the couple of days' conversation, as was obvious, all over again. Maud said Papa would be so pleased to make his acquaintance; and for once, in using that time-honored and generally significant formula, Maud knew she was speaking the strict truth. The Rector would have taken such a promising young acolyte to his heart after five minutes' conversation on the com-

mon theme; and it was really a thousand pities that Marmaduke could never become his son-in-law, according to Violet: since a path of roses, literally, would have conducted him to his heart's desire.

But Violet was perfectly right. Maud left the house in Livingstone Gardens exactly at the end of the stipulated fortnight: promising to tell Mamma that she was fairly satisfied with Violet's appearance, and absolutely disgusted with Charlie's way of treating her: and hoping to see more of Mr. Jones. Only when Maud next reported a long and interesting conversation with Violet's nice Mr. Jones, in the Glasswell drawing-room, on the subject of helpfully scientific story-books for village boys, Violet's nice Mr. Jones was engaged to Felicia Addenbroke, and *Maud knew it*.

Then, and only then, Charles quenched the last spark of his hopes in life for Maud, and went round the breakfast table, ostensibly to feel Violet's hair, in order to see if a little crescent-moon was growing in front of it. He was afraid, he said, that she might have caught it from Maud, when the poor girl was staying there; and such a growth was reckoned dangerous, in the profession, for married women,—particularly youngish ones.

Then he said, if Jones was determined to ruin the last pages of his blameless narrative, and marry Lisette against both of their better judgment, and in the teeth of the path (a literary protest, at this point, disregarded) in the teeth of the path of clerical respectability and life-long happiness Charles had pointed out to him, in the person of Maud,—then Jones' over-driven editor saw nothing for it but to hint in the last chapter, for the private ear of Jones' readers, that he had fallen head-over-ears in love with Lisette, at short notice, while under the intoxicating influences of the great French capital. In virtue of which sad reflection Jones' readers might learn all sorts of things; or, if they preferred it, nothing at all. Co-editors might append, in an appendix,

an abridged list of the other young fellows, not to mention old ones, whom Felicia had knocked end-long in the same manner, in the course of her singular career, beginning with the Dean and Studley. Sir Claude Ashwin might come in a good third, since Charles understood he intended to present Lisette, on the happy occasion, with a string of pearls very nearly as costly as those of his daughter's Lisette had failed to steal. And Charles trusted Violet was not taking him too seriously in these remarks, because if she did, he should shake her.

Then he said,—his wife having long since given him the coffee he had come round the table, in the first instance, to fetch,—that if Violet wanted to go down to Glasswell, and have a long day's hay-making, without her wedding-ring, as Maud suggested, and sit on the very top of the cart, with her hair over her ears, and her arms about her knees, quite alone,—no man but the Rector in a straw hat near her, for miles,—she might.

Only he would awfully like to come too. Because the pursuit of hay-making, not to mention the pursuit of strawberries in Mr. Gibbs' beds, appealed to him: and girls when they got together were such geese, and Violet might fall off the cart sky-larking with young Maud about the place. Also, Charles' mother lived down there.

We give Charles' half of this conversation, unfortunately much compressed for lack of space, because Violet's replies, though they seemed to be a satisfaction to herself, were really not worth offering to a critical world, when her husband got well into his best vein of dialogue. In fact, the thing should be called monologue, with interruption, uninvited and rigorously repressed, at intervals.

Having polished off his peroration to these utterances, Charles stopped feeling Violet's hair for the crescent, and flattened down the locks he had deranged, very kindly, and went back to his place to drink his coffee, with a sense of duty done. And Violet herself returned,

rather wearily, to the study of a letter from Honoria Addenbroke on the same subject, that is, the first of Charles' subjects, her sister's match with Mr. Jones: a letter which, for sheer unpleasantness and lack of feeling, beat everything of which Violet had thought even Honoria was capable. At the end of the communication, Honoria was kind enough to propose occupying "a bed in a corner" in Violet's "little house" for the days that included the ceremony; by which she could only have meant Violet's solitary cherished guest-room, which Maud had just quitted, with regret.

"She wants to avoid Lisette, dear," explained Violet in some perplexity, when conveying these contents to her husband. "To have Lisette marrying a fortune at this stage is too much for Honoria, naturally. If she stays with Father, she and Lisette will fight like cats: and that," added Mrs. Shovell pensively, "will be so bad for the Billy-goat."

Lisette, it should be mentioned, had called her son Godfrey William, being a dignified pair of names, sanctified by Ingestre usage for centuries; but as she addressed him as a "billy-goat" whenever his behavior called for criticism, which was, by Lisette's fine standards, very frequently, the attentive family of Ashwin had adopted the term, and continued to use it until Godfrey William was of an age to protest in person, long after the close of this chronicle.

"Probably she wants to avoid the Billy-goat too," added Violet, pondering Honoria's letter. "She mentions here she loathes children; and I remember, *à propos* of her teaching, she told me so before."

"We fed her too well," was Charles' opinion, "and she liked the feel of your sofa. It still bears the mark of the beast, and makes the drawing-room look filthy. She liked me a little too, I shouldn't wonder. . . . I won't have her on the premises, Violet, and that's flat."

He spoke in a tone,—occurring about twice in a

twelve-month,—which conveyed that he meant what he said; and Violet obeyed his direct command, as usual, with relief, and refused Honoria: risking, of course, in so doing the immediate result, that Honoria told everybody in reach that she was a jealous little vixen, who stored up grudges for a bit of fun.

The wedding, carefully shunted out of the season by collusion of the Ingestres and Ashwins, who met in conspicuously friendly alliance over Felicia's settlement, since John had seen fit to express, before witnesses, an obligation, was of the quietest description: furtive, it might have been called, as everybody was eager to spare Felicia's feelings in the matter,—feelings which, in fact, had no existence. Lisette was immensely pleased, and overwhelmingly amused, at the whole affair. Not surprised exactly, she explained to Violet, when they sat together, with the baby between them, in the room that had once been Violet's,—because she had always known Duke was "that sort" from the first. He had missed far too many good opportunities, by Lisette's reckoning, to be any other "sort" than the very limited "sort" to which he belonged. That it was a good sort, Lisette was quite ready to admit when Violet suggested it, only it appealed to her innate sense of the humorous so irresistibly. She had told a French fellow about him once, and the fellow had roared over her description, and the sketch, rather a good one, she had added for his enlightenment. Lisette only wondered that Duke had stammered and stuttered so long over asking her; but the process of watching him, and commenting on his peculiar proceedings to "Cousin Claude," was so exquisitely entertaining, that Lisette would not have shortened it, for worlds. Nor would Sir Claude, for worlds, it appeared, when Violet, having heard all Lisette's opinions, interviewed him in turn: since by this means he retained Lisette a little longer at his side, and before his eyes, in Eveleen's absence, at the dinner-table.

"Will anything come of it, Father?" Violet inquired, after they had discussed at length all the details of the ceremonial occasion on which she, by request, was to act for him as hostess. "I try to be amused and delighted: but I can't feel that it is real."

"Nor I," said Sir Claude, "but I will do my best to make it so. The man, as far as I can follow him, is almost first-rate. He is an exceptional man. I would hardly have trusted her to another, but I do to him."

"It's safer, in a way, do you think, that——" she hesitated.

"That he should not be 'mad on her'? That's her own phrase for it—yes. She really has been sated with that, she does not value it. I believe she fears it a little. I tried to discover one evening, having the chance, if she would go back to M. Edmond, granted we found him. For a time I thought that might be the best solution: but she does not want to, now. She is very English, and clings to English things. I could tell that by her eyes, though her lips said that Edmond was decent to her, and she didn't mind if she did."

"She would do anything you told her," said Violet thoughtfully, not surprised. Her father saw Lisette's value, her intrinsic value, as she did; and had taken the trouble to study her closely, her method of looking on life, and some, at least, of the motives that guided her. They were not Eveleen's motives, purely animal. She had a variety of the artist's brain, and an exquisite sensitiveness to passing impression that Eveleen might well have envied. She was a perfect mother, instinctively: not conscientiously at all. She would have died willingly, instantly, at any moment, for her child; indeed, Claude had an idea that she did not value her own life highly, though she shrank from pain. Something,—call it dignity,—by which she lived, the thing that served her for moral support, had been broken utterly, in the catastrophe. Her personal pride was in ruins,—the delicacy that was in her, though she had never learnt

the alphabet of its expression. It was only the child, in life, that remained. Her reckless courage was still intact; she was ready to live, and face a new life, strange as that life was bound to be to all her instincts, for her child's sake. But she was, even in Dr. Ashwin's loving care, even with Marmaduke Jones' anxious attentions, off her true course, astray from her landmarks. She had been dragged from her own happy, pleasant little path in life, and seemed seeking for it continually. Claude had encouraged her to paint, and she would paint cleverly for a time; then she bit her lip, her eyes diverted to the child, and she went back to it: as though of that at least, in the wreck of her rainbow world, she could be sure.

"I think," said Claude, "the man will share his name and fortune with her merely, and keep her a permanent guest in his house. He is not skilled in expression, as you know, but one sees his meaning later, generally: and it is my belief, Violet, that he has told me that. And if he purposes that, he will do it, beyond any question at all. It seems to me an unheard-of thing," he added thoughtfully, "and it upsets me into laughter occasionally. But I daresay it has its equal in history. I should not wonder the least."

Lisette's story can, and should, be very simply finished.

She married Jones, and made him an exquisite little wife, tractable and affectionate, for just two years. Then she died,—no one knew why, a determined drifting upon extinction, her apparent lack of any definite disease much embarrassing her professional attendants. Claude Ashwin, who did not attend her, since she lived so far, but who watched her at intervals, said she died of her soul; but when a great doctor takes to talking like that it is evident he cannot expect the attention of serious people.

The fact, at least, was unquestionable; she was found

one morning lifeless: and they called it heart failure, and made the best of such symptoms as they could exaggerate, or invent. It was doubtless in a fashion a failure of heart, the expression would do. Like the pretty tale of Allingham's, they thought that she was fast asleep, but she was dead—of sorrow. For it looked as though Lisette had been able, even in the act of "realizing herself," "working out her personality," or whatever other scraps of modern philosophy Honoria misused and misquoted, to suffer. She had suffered in realizing, perhaps, since a few characters undoubtedly exist, nature's flowers in the rich intellectual fields of humanity, who do better not to realize. Howsoever it may be, Goldsmith, a man of genius and of heart, though sadly out of Honoria's period, came nearer to the final truth of Lisette than Honoria and her up-to-date authorities. She died for want of that little personal genius of hers, that had been so ruthlessly snatched away.

Hers was, beyond any doubt, the second life sacrificed by Eveleen Ashwin's brutal indifference to all well-being but her own; and since Lady Ashwin felt no overpowering remorse or grief on the occasion, her husband and daughter, as ever, shared the penalty. Sir Claude and Violet joined themselves to Jones in his genuine sorrow, and he had to thank them for innumerable marks of sympathy, gratitude, and esteem; but he would accept no material assistance, from one or the other, in the matter of the child, which was his legacy and burden in life. Jones brought Godfrey up to be a son of the state, according to his ideas, and made "a very good thing of it" in his own phrase, though he was much too modest to use it.

John Ingestre was interested in Godfrey too, at intervals; but John Ingestre and Jones could never really meet on common ground: and their cautious and courteous correspondence would no doubt have made an amusing appendix to this history had anyone been able

to get the letters. But it would not have carried the sympathetic much further, though it might have entertained the curious: for Jones would never betray his life's convictions to such as John. The only person to whom he regularly confided his educational perplexities was Violet Shovell: and her letters in return were certainly preserved, long after her cousin John's lordly scrawls had gone the way of all paper to the dust-heap. By this means, at least, Jones kept a link with Violet, for life: and he kept the little Ledger miniature too, a worthy record of a beauty that remained, to those who had seen it, phenomenal, a thing apart: and stored it with Lisette's real pearls,—her own, not Violet's, worn on her wedding-day.

Eveleen did not die: she lived, with immense persistence and vitality, for years; but she never recovered her perfect balance, mental or physical, after the short period of genuine panic through which, owing to everybody's fault but her own, it had been her hard lot to pass. Words could not express,—certainly Eveleen's words could not,—after short wandering, to watering-places first, and then, for her dignity's sake, to relatives, her relief at returning to her own house, the rooms she knew, the chairs she liked, and the servants who looked at her, for all their temporary show of independent spirit on the evening of her nightmare, with blank faces that implied a master's command in the background, and could be taken for respect, as required.

Claude's sole revenge on her, for the suffering she had caused, was to let her know the fact, by word of mouth since she would not read his letters, that but for Violet's definite leading, he would never have received her. But it was quite useless. Lady Ashwin seemed to take her daughter's clemency for granted, and found Claude's severity, generally speaking, showing grosteque unreason and deplorable lack of taste.

She had bought some extremely beautiful dresses in Paris, which she kindly wore once or twice to show him: since she always liked to be sure of his opinion, whether he expressed it or not, before she broke in her glory on the world. Even if he was cross-grained and unpleasant, his opinion could easily be seen by the vague expression in his eyes, at moments when, in the heat of discussion on other things, she caught him off his guard. Thus Eveleen discovered that he flatly disliked the colors in one of her costumes; and since, on second thoughts, she inclined that way herself, though her maid admired it intensely, she sent it back.

It was also a comfort, on returning to her own, to be met by Claude at the station, and to tell him, with the greatest frankness, exactly in what manner, and for how long, she had felt uncomfortable. She could remember all the details, even yet, very well, for she had hardly known physical discomfort before, in her life: except during the disgusting period when Violet came into a world where nobody wanted her: that is to say, where her mother did not.

Claude did not appear sympathetic on the subject of this lengthy torture of hers, but he suggested things to do which proved efficacious, and that, after all, is the principal thing. Lady Ashwin's foreign doctors had been exquisitely courteous, but, judged by results, had proved hardly worth the trouble of talking to, apart from all question of the fee. Claude also proposed outdoor air and physical exertion: so Eveleen, after pouting a little over the prescription, returned to horse exercise, which she had enjoyed in her youth; and which she now found more agreeable and refreshing,—and infinitely more becoming,—than she had recollected.

In addition to this, every now and then, when she drifted in dialogue onto certain subjects, and found it hard, a tiring effort, to get off them again, Claude's clear, sharp speech was of assistance. It was only a

pity that, when she was out in the world and the same curious thing occurred, Claude not being there to help her, people found her a bore, and Eveleen did not like it. She had never been a bore, though she had never tried to be the kind of chatterer who produces a crackle of laughter continually. Her conversation had been sought for itself, not only for the infinite privilege, to the other party, of sitting near her. Consequently, she did not care for people to look at her in a certain manner. So she shrank slowly, very slowly, back from the society where she had reigned of old, to her own hearth; and talked to Claude, who was never bored by anything: only inattentive at times, owing to his habit of fussing about a multitude of stupid people for whom Eveleen did not care, and whose miseries and disappointments in life could be nothing, as compared with her own.

She saw Violet now and then, generally in society: and looked on at her success with a curious combination of interest and jealousy. Violet did not really, according to Eveleen, know the way to do it, though she had good ideas, at times. She dressed perfectly,—Eveleen had always admitted that,—and spent little on it, which her mother approved likewise; and she knew how to make the best of herself, pretty well, though, when she was chattering her hardest, with several people at once, she flung herself about too much, and made faces. Also she made too much noise—that is, produced too much around her. She did not make much noise herself, and always greeted her mother without fussing, kindly. People seemed to want her, which was something, and there was that little stir at her entrance, and at her departure, that Eveleen liked to see. That was Ingestre, that stirring power, the thing that brought lounging men to their feet, and made cold women put up their glasses. Eveleen herself could still do that: and looked tranquilly forward to doing it, all her life.

III

EPILOGUE AND NOTE

I

"ENFIN," said Mr. Ingestre quietly, interrupting a particularly flourishing flirtation with one of his younger relations, as once more the party round the baronial fireplace in the entrance-hall was disturbed by a new arrival. "Madame sait se faire attendre."

He had risen with his usual difficulty, having risen that evening for no other guest, and passing an arm about the latest comer, furs and all, greeted her as an elderly kinsman may.

"Nobody with you?" he inquired sarcastically.

"He can't, till Christmas Eve," explained Violet. "He's buried under the Christmas books. He's terribly sorry,—he just sent me on to say."

"We regret it," said Mr. Ingestre, glancing once about him, "by the form."

"Cousin John, if you begin like that before I have even got my hat off——"

"Take off her hat, Agatha," said her host, "and fling it over the wind-mills, or anywhere handy; and let's have a truce to prudery, from the start. We don't go in for it, Honoria there will tell you. Allow me to introduce such as are necessary, Violet. It does not seem to be many. Turn round."

"Who is she?" inquired one of the minority, needing an introduction, to one of the majority at her side.

"Mrs. Shovell. Don't you know her? Jolly fun," said the member of the majority, tilting his chair.

"I've heard of her. That little thing? I thought she was a beauty. Is she related to the Ingestres, then?"

"Own daughter to the incredible Eveleen. Didn't you know?"

"Good gracious me!" The minority stared again. "Well, she doesn't look it. Why isn't Lady Ashwin here?"

"Oh—not been well lately, they say. Rather out of things," said the majority, with a face the blankness of which was bound to mean something. He only trusted he was not going to be asked for details of the story, because he barely knew them: and, besides, such vaporous tragedies were a bore. One cannot treat them lightly, in the interests of "form"; and for the credit of the Christmas season, one should try to avoid being serious.

"Her husband's coming on Christmas Day," he said, to move the subject. "Mrs. Shovell was saying so to Mrs. Ingestre just now. Not her own husband, you know, but Eveleen's. That is, they're both coming, Shovell too, if I caught her drift correctly. Beastly row those fellows make: you can't hear a thing."

The majority, like many another before him, regretted the soft timbre of Mrs. Shovell's voice, which was easily drowned in company. And loud-voiced company was pressing upon her rather; for there was a dance that evening in three hours' time, and they hoped Mrs. Shovell had given up pretending not to dance, since half the world knew she did.

"I believe I dance," said Violet, "I really can't remember. I don't mind trying, with somebody kind."

Everybody was kind, eagerly. It was quite encouraging to set eyes on such a kind-hearted community as Mr. Ingestre had collected about his hearth that evening. So Mrs. Shovell was kind too, by degrees, as she took off her gloves; very leisurely degrees, since she was cold, and wanted her tea, and they were all interrupting her conversation with her hostess, most terribly.

She looked well again, Agatha was glad to see, though still ethereal a trifle. Her energy, socially speaking, was tremendous, as Mrs. Ingestre gathered from reports received, for she went out less herself in these days. Violet was a small star as yet, but a very bright one, and an

Object of persistent curiosity to the society astronomers; for she shone not only by reason of reflected light, as the foregoing dialogue may demonstrate; though, to such as knew the history, Eveleen's dark luster made a very telling background to her own delicate little beam.

"How frightfully nice it is," said Violet to her cousin Agatha in confidence, patting the original lap-dog, which seemed after all to have survived Charles' cracknels, and even fattened upon the food. "It looks as inviting as possible to-night, with those green leaves round the frames. I can't think why I was so frightened of it all, that time,—three years ago."

"That was it, was it?" said Agatha. "I have often tried to get to the bottom of that incident, and discover from the servants what really went wrong. Markham said the young lady and gentleman talked so nicely at dinner,—particularly the young lady,—that he was sure it was all right, really: nothing seriously amiss."

"Cousin Agatha!" The girl blushed, laying her cup down in her lap. "You don't mean Markham said it, really?—Oh, I'm sorry, I'm dense: it's a sense of guilt. I have never got over a guilty feeling in the matter. It was really so ungrateful,—must have looked so,—that *sauve-qui-peut*. But it was one,—we were terrified."

"The honeymoon is an abuse that wants attending to," said Agatha, making tea for ten people at once while she spoke. "Mine was a nightmare."

She added this last information very low indeed, amid the clash of cups. Since Agatha had been considered one of the luckiest women of her generation, the thing almost equaled a confession. But then, people confessed unaware in Mrs. Shovell's company, very frequently. It was partly because she gave herself away, by her own little blushes, even in a dialogue which her tongue managed quite cleverly. This habit of impetuous self-betrayal in the intervals of elegant discourse is encouraging to the opposite party to be sincere as well.

"I wish," said Agatha, some time later, when the claims of new guests arriving broke in upon her peace again, "I had any hope of seeing much of you; but this may very well be our first and last conversation. You must believe I should be glad to, if I could."

Mrs. Ingestre had no daughter, and her only daughter-in-law disliked her. A "companion," suavely proposed by John for her relief whenever she broke down, was a confession of incompetence revolting to her independent nature. Honoria Addenbroke, whom she asked, from pure kindness, regularly every hunting-season, might easily have acted a daughter's part, since she knew the house and its habitués. But Honoria could not be bothered with house-keeping flummeries, so Agatha understood; and, besides, she was always offending people. Thus Mrs. Ingestre, who was ageing rapidly in body for all her vigorous spirit, was left to deal with the yearly invasion, practically alone.

Mrs. Shovell, turning to the male majority perforce again, took a note by the way of these really flagrant facts, which simply jumped at one in the first half-hour of arrival in Agatha's hospitable hall. The poor woman had more than she could do, even getting the tea poured and distributed: she did not,—nobody does nowadays,—order the young men about sufficiently: and it was sheer sweetness on her part not to have the servants in, and so disturb the agreeable sense of intimacy, which all enjoyed,—except Agatha,—in this gathering of old friends.

The result of the said note on Violet's mental tablet was that she not only had several more conversations with Agatha during that busy week, but the business of the week was greatly lightened for the hostess by her ready hands and tongue. It is rare for a popular young woman in a house-party, the especially distinguished favorite of its head, to put herself definitely on the side of its overworked mistress from the start. It is even a little delicate and difficult to accomplish, when the lord and master of

both house and housekeeper chooses to show himself jealous of the young woman's society: but it can be done. Mrs. Shovell proved it could be done: with the greater ease that she was already on friendly terms with most of Agatha's servants, whose hearts she had won by her shy and gentle bearing during the first week of her married life. The butler and the chauffeur loved her particularly: and she was surprised in deep conference with the latter gentleman by Mr. Ingestre, the first morning of her visit, in the drive.

"Thinking of running off again?" said John. "I won't have it." And he took her severely into custody, while the chauffeur hid his blushes in the car.

Honorina, looking on at Violet's proceedings, in a superior and sneering manner, took notes of all her flirtations, —or as many as she could by any means see or overhear, —in case Charles wanted to know. Unless he displayed curiosity, Honorina did not intend to volunteer the information. They would undoubtedly have other affairs to discuss, when they met, more amusing; and since anyone could detect on sight the sort of girl she was, now Honorina had her in the open, the matter was of small moment.

Honorina had suddenly become engaged again, not to the original party, but another; so she had a splendid position from which to discourse to the world concerning the "fun" she had enjoyed in days gone by, with the "Shovell boy," and others of his kind. She was enjoying her position to the full, this pleasant Christmas season: and could afford to be less disagreeable than usual, even talking once or twice, with chaffing condescension, of her sister, Mrs. Jones.

John Ingestre told Violet, *à propos* of Honorina's betrothal, that he simply could not make out how the girl did it, and he wished Violet would find out for him, if she could put up with so much of Honorina's society. The man was not forthcoming, said John,—possibly unpre-

sentable,—but there was no doubt he was there. He owned horses, too, because Honoria rode them. John thought a gentleman-farmer, with a broad Somersetshire accent: and the horses, cart-horses, very likely.

“It would take a cart-horse to carry her,” said John reflectively: having that moment mounted Violet on the best and quietest of his.

He chose the quietest, because he was inclined to be over-careful of her,—what in a slightly older gentleman would have been called fussy. Comparing her constantly, involuntarily, as he did, with her mother, and the other splendid women of his house, he could not believe she was not as fragile as she looked. If Violet had tried to be like her mother, John would not have admired her: he would have regretfully retired; but with feminine cunning, she had adopted a type in almost perfect contrast: “deuced clever,” in John’s opinion, since it enabled him both to admire her extremely, and to pet her to his heart’s content.

“Don’t you do anything reckless, madam,” he said warningly, from the steps. “I’ve heard what you’re like on the downs. Dering,—Mannering,—Johnny,—you young fellows look out.”

The last person he addressed was his own son, who came up in a cousinly and unassuming fashion on Mrs. Shovell’s other side; most attentive to paternal command, as was evident, and anxious to oblige him, before the other fellows alluded to got in. The other fellows had to get up first, before they could get in, and Johnny, fortunately, had mounfed down at the stable. So he and Mrs. Shovell were well ahead, half-way to the western gates, before young Dering, and Mannering the secretary, and Johnny’s wife, and so on, trotted after. “So on” was Miss Addenbroke, far and away the best rider of the party, men included, but out of her element in what she contemptuously called an “amble.” She was desperately bored, that day on the downs, entirely owing to

Violet; so she saved that grievance up for Charles, as well.

Charles came down late on the Friday night, right into the middle of the Christmas dance. He could, with an effort, have caught a train which would have landed him just in time for it; but Charles seldom found it worth while in life to make such efforts, and took things easily, as they came. Thus, having dressed at his leisure, examined the comfortable quarters destined to him in detail, and chaffed such servants as recognized him on his way downstairs, he appeared on the festive scene in the hall about half-past ten o'clock; and, since late comers cannot choose, he took on Honoria, or any other girl who had room on her card, very agreeably.

Honoria had plenty of room,—she danced less well than she rode,—but Charles considered, even for old sake's sake, two was enough. She seemed in a pleasant frame of mind, which was something, and, by Charles' reckoning, she paid her way. For, sitting out in private corners which he discovered for her, she told him all the best anecdotes of that house-party, one by one, and brought him up to date with her own business and everybody else's, so that he could start fair at breakfast-time on Christmas morning. This was really kind of her, and Charles appreciated it. He was vague, but courteous, in response: and amusing now and then, apparently by mistake. He was really rather tired with a hard week's work, and inclined to let others do the entertaining.

Several of the young men Honoria dealt with so faithfully were his personal friends, but he had not the heart to tell her so; nor did he so much as blink when Violet's name came up in close conjunction with some of theirs. That part of Honoria's information interested him especially; for, exchanging the jests of the mason with Johnny and others in passing, he had learnt among other confidences, that, do what they would, they could not get Mrs. Shovell away from the elder John. He was, it appeared

by the young men's discourse, always pouncing upon her in better company, and carrying her off to bore her about books and such rot behind the scenes; which was sickening luck on Mrs. Shovell, in the first place; and in the second place, sickening luck on Johnny and company, who growled to Charles.

Thus Charles sat comparing notes, and looking engaging, at Miss Addenbroke's side: rather obscured by her magnificence, but bearing it well. He helped her along by a word when she seemed to be running down, and looked for Violet, surreptitiously, meanwhile. He heard of her constantly, on all sides, like a fairy-tale, but he could not discover her in the life. Since everybody else seemed to have met her, and assured him she was dancing, all the time, this was really mysterious: but he laid it to her elfin nature. When she wanted to hide from him, she could, and Charles supposed she wanted to. He would take it out of her, naturally, later on; but in the meantime he was most suavely, seasonably, and senselessly agreeable to other girls.

"There's your wife," said the very girl he was talking to once, in the small ivy-embowered balcony above the hall.

"Where?" said Charles, with interest, leaning his arms upon the balustrade, and looking down upon the crowd.

It was a charming crowd to look at,—wreaths of delicate color beneath the burnished foliage, and it did his eyes good: for Charles loved all festivity, and he had been extraordinarily hard-working and home-keeping, of necessity, of late. It happened that one of the moments had come, at his office, to make a stride, and he was making it: partly to please Violet, who did not know at present, and partly to show a scoffing world that he could concentrate, when he liked. Now he intended to relax in proportion; and it struck him the place he was in promised well for the purpose, though he would not commit himself to an opinion at present. Charles' fashion of "slack-

ing" was his own, an art perfected by long study; and he was very particular about its materials, choosing and discarding for some time before he found the right ones, for his spirit's need.

"She *was* there," said the girl beside him, puzzled. "I saw the thing in her hair."

"Not a little crescent thing?" said Charles anxiously. "In front?"

"No,—at the side. I can't remember what shape." The girl was still searching vainly among the drifting figures below. "It must be because she's so small," she said, giving it up.

"She's not really small," said Charles. "She's as tall as you are,—perhaps a little less."

"So light, then,—what is it? You never know where she's going to be next. *You* ought to be able to find her." She looked at her companion quizzically. "You ought at least to know her by sight."

"Oh, I do, I think," said Charles. "I mean, I should know her when I saw her. Fact is, I've not really given my mind to it at present, Miss——" Her name escaped him. "I shall see her after midnight, I expect."

"Mr. Shovell! That sounds like a story." This was evidently a nice girl. Honoria had introduced her, so Charles had expected nothing of her, and it was a relief to find her so conversable. She was a complete stranger to him, and also, as it seemed, to most of the house-party; so Honoria, ponderously benevolent, had taken her in charge for the evening.

"You won't get hold of her after midnight," she warned Charles. "She'll be engaged deeper than ever then."

"I don't say I shall get hold of her," he explained. "I don't say I want to. I shall catch sight of her, that's all."

"She's an absolutely exquisite dancer," observed the girl. "They all say that."

"I know. When you see them only after twelve o'clock," said Charles dreamily, "they are."

"Thanks so much," said the girl, when she went back to her patroness, Miss Addenbroke. "He's delightful, and quite mad. We had a splendid time up there. Did you see us peering down?"

"Yes," said Honoria, who had occupied the same hiding-place with Charles, shortly before. He knew every corner of this house, to a surprising degree, as though he had explored it before now, in congenial company. He had introduced Honoria almost at once to that little gallery, an excellent post for spying, to which nobody but he, apparently, had learnt the way.

"He's a publisher or something of the kind," said the girl, who had clearly been amused by Charles, "and he says his head is turned with the Christmas books, and that nothing seems quite real to him. He kept on forgetting my name, and excused himself in the same words every time. He said he began to believe in me before I left him, and might consequently venture to ask me for another dance. But I had to tell him my name again for him to write it on his card. He said he saw goblins among the roots of the oaks in the park as he drove up, and the moon struck him as the wrong shape. And he said the moment he came in at the door he felt something was not quite right with the house: and that you had made him feel sure of it."

"I?" said Honoria. Charles had risked the chance of his partner passing this on, because he had an idea Miss Addenbroke would misunderstand it. She did.

"Oh," she said, "I hope he has not taken everything I told him *au pied de la lettre*. I just put him into the swim of things a bit; and I mentioned his wife's little games with Johnny, among others, and Mrs. Johnny's state of mind. He didn't take it too seriously, I hope."

"I am certain he didn't," said the girl. "Because, firstly, he is quite incapable of taking anything seriously,

Miss Addenbroke, at least to-night. And secondly, because that sort of thing would run off him as soon as said. He's killing about her,—might have been married yesterday. He's far worse than Mr. John."

After that the girl, who was just at the point, reached by most people after an evening's acquaintance, of having had enough of Honoria, parted with her brusquely and went elsewhere for introductions.

Shortly after twelve o'clock, when Christmas morning had come in, and everybody was at their silliest, in accordance with the excellent tradition at that hour of the year, Charles met this sympathetic girl in the press below again.

"It's all right, you see," he reassured her with a nod, in confidence: having at the minute his wife's hand through his arm. "Just when the clock began to purr, I saw something that looked like her,—like what I remembered, you know. And before it had finished striking, there she was over by the door."

"I hope she seems as usual," laughed the girl, glancing apology at Violet beyond, who did not know her the least. Violet's eyebrows were up, patiently, as though Charles had long been putting her through this sort of thing.

"She said she had been out in the park." Charles looked at his late partner with serious blue eyes. "She said the *moon* was so beautiful. It struck me as a bit—well! What do you say, Miss——" he had forgotten her name again.

"You might introduce me, at least," murmured Violet, though with little hope of Charles.

"He can't," said the other girl, laughing. "He simply can't remember it for five minutes: and it's not a long one, either, nor hard to spell. . . . I think, Mr. Shovell, it looks bad. You have noticed nothing wrong at present, I hope."

"Only the way she dances," said Charles privately. "It's not quite what I remembered,—not quite."

"Worse?" murmured the girl.

"Better. . . . She'd been *practicing*. . . . There!" said Charles, waking suddenly into a perfectly normal frame of mind, and speaking in a normal tone of voice. "There's a decent space at last, good business. Got your train safe, ducky? Come along."

II

The next day, being that indescribable thing, regarded as a day, the twenty-fifth of December, most of the young women were bored by the afternoon, and the young men, largely ill-tempered, felt the need of violent exercise. Shovell had good ideas in these things, and he proposed a game: so all the young men went out to have a game, in the flattest field of the home farm. They would not say what sort of game,—no one ventured to give it a title,—they looked vague about it. But they took their hockey clubs,—at least, those did who had them,—and the others, if they could not borrow from Johnny, took all sorts of things.

They particularly did not want any girls,—the rites were private,—but they behaved so very darkly about it beforehand, especially Charles, that several girls felt curious, and stole down in the course of the afternoon, behind the hedge, to see. Miss Addenbroke and one other girl, eventually, were allowed to play, as numbers proved short, and were intolerably puffed up in consequence; but even they,—one of them a Wrangler,—could not define precisely afterwards what the game had been. It had to go down to posterity unclassified. They were only all certain of one thing,—that Mr. Shovell was very silly.

They all got extremely hot, and disreputable, and muddy; but they came trooping home in excellent spirits finally; and if the Christmas fare that evening was worthily discussed, Mr. Ingestre's cook should have thanked Charles.

"Where's Mrs. Shovell got to?" said somebody, dur-

ing a truce of the *mêlée*, to young John. The group of intruding girls by the hedge certainly did not include her at the moment; but she might, of course, have been there once, and evaporated. That was what somebody meant. Also, every nice girl comes down once to watch her husband play, if he show such misdirected prowess as Shovell. Somebody, who was John Ingestre's secretary, probably included this in his suggestion. Heroes on the field of glory are terse.

"She's got nowhere," said the son of the house, "since she never came out. Mother said Sir Claude Ashwin was coming down for the afternoon."

"What's he?" said the secretary.

"A doctor of sorts," said young John. "Violet stopped to see him."

"Oh, I say! What's that for?" said the secretary, alarmed.

"'Cause he's her father," said Johnny. "Ho, ho! One for you, Mannering. Look at his face!"

"Looks at the last gasp, doesn't she?" said the next person, who was lying on his back on the grass. "Not got over that eighth waltz with you, Mannering, last night. Ha, ha!"

This is the kind of mood those young men were in. We will refrain from quoting more than is quite necessary of their conversations.

"She's got him fast, so far," said Mr. Ingestre, in the seclusion of his own little room of business, scratching his chin. "Though how she's done it——"

He spoke to Claude, who had, very properly, granted him the preliminary interview, which John now seemed inclined to draw out. Violet was not the subject of the interview, which was semi-official in character; they had only recurred to her by way of natural relief from the main theme, peculiarly painful to John. Besides, Mr. Ingestre was genuinely curious about the little Shovell

ménage,—perplexed almost; and he had an idea that Claude might throw some light on the problem, if teased sufficiently. Claude, being in a lazy mood, did not seem inclined to disturb himself on the matter, so John did most of the talking. Charles' stability was evidently a nine days' wonder to John, as to Eveleen. He could not get over Charles.

"Not that I've anything against the girl," he said, for her father's reassurance. "The contrary,—I delight in her. She's a permanent type, belongs to no generation in particular. That's why I can put our Jack's nose out of joint, when we both happen to want her simultaneously. I knew a dozen charming women more or less like her in my time,—well, Claude, one or two. And I observe Johnny's side is rather at a loss when she runs into four syllables. She only does it when she's excited, bless her,—takes the greatest care of 'em generally." John scratched his chin, and reverted. "It's the lad. We know all about that sort, you know,—had heaps of 'em. I knew about his father before him, too. He's a scatter-brain,—rogue, as Agatha says,—a born philanderer. Nothing to get hold of anywhere, you'd say." A solemn pause, Claude offering no assistance.

"She's pretty, of course,—prettyish," said John. "Lord knows if she's pretty or not,—I'm always looking at her to see if I can find out. Perhaps that's what keeps the boy going, eh?—You needn't scoff, Claude. She's really not a patch on what her mother was, anyhow."

"Not a patch," agreed Claude, who was not scoffing, at least audibly. He was enjoying the country view out of the ground-floor window.

"And he's a grievance," proceeded John, "in that business of the child. That's a fair grievance, if he wanted one. She was in the wrong there, you'll admit."

"I admitted it," said Claude, "to the extent of telling her so, at some length. That entered my office, as I considered."

"You scolded her, did you? Did you inform her she was rash?"

"Naturally,—that's what I mean. I was on the medical tack."

"Pish!" said John rudely. He was often rude to Claude,—it relieved him. "As regards her hold on her husband, I mean."

"No," said Claude, considering. "I did not dwell on that, so far as I remember."

"It might not have struck her," said John. "She probably had other worries at the time."

The doctor laughed, and then excused himself. Then he told John, as already once before during the conversation, that his house had a remarkably fine position. After that he answered John's last observation.

"I do that sort of thing badly," he explained. "Not to mention there was no need to harp on it, since Eveleen was safe to do so."

"Ah," said John, interested. "Yes, to be sure." He had not thought of Eveleen.

"Besides," Claude pursued calmly, "it would have approached impertinence, from me. Violet knows her business better than I do. I never saw a girl give her mind to anything as she did to that boy the year before her marriage,—and she had evidence and to spare," he added, "of his instability then. I had my own doubts at the time if he were worth her pains."

"Eh?" John was more interested. "Why didn't you forbid the banns?"

"I left it to her," said Claude.

"Pooh," said John. "Under twenty, wasn't she? What's the good of that?"

"I was approaching fifty," said Claude idly. "What's the good of that?"

"You're talking nonsense, Ashwin," his host warned him, "and I'm serious. Besides, you needn't pretend you're over fifty,—I know better. . . . You think the girl did it with her eyes open, then?"

"Her marriage?"

"No,—confound you! That escapade to Dover."

"Wide open," said Claude. "All night, worse luck." His own absent eyes softened at the memory. "She was even, as you suggested yourself, Ingestre, looking at more than one thing at once. Women have to."

"Fiddlesticks!" returned John: and the dialogue ended.

John's dialogues with Claude frequently did; yet he could never resist the temptation, next time he came across him, of attacking their innumerable differences again. He had such a violent desire, during the period of their conversation, to drag Claude round to his opinion; but the most he could generally accomplish was to reduce him to silence: or worse, as lately, to make him laugh.

His position with the younger man was the more difficult that, in all that concerned the question of Eveleen, Claude was beyond reproach at his present host's hands, or even criticism. He even seemed to be conscious of John's feelings on the subject, which John most angrily concealed. Mr. Ingestre could not really bear to talk of Eveleen, the débâcle of her great glory,—that terrible twilight of the gods that was worse, by far, than death to John, as to all who had ever adored her. Yet Claude himself had adored her, John could not deny; and there he sat, taking it with that fatal medical calm,—as though such a thing had ever happened to such a woman before! He seemed to know all John's feeling as he talked; he was dexterous and gentle as he would have been with any sensitive patient; and yet the head of her family knew all there was to know of Eveleen, invariably, before Mr. Ingestre, often with deliberate discourtesy, shut off communications. From such angry striving with the inevitable, the subject of the "little girl's" affairs, the little sorrows and showers of the spring-tide, were an almost exquisite solace to John. Perhaps to the little girl's father too, only, with such as Claude, one could not know.

"Well," said John, finally releasing him, "go to the child; she's waiting, I suppose. I thought she might invade us if I dawdled, but I suppose, as usual, she is too correct. What's that?"

The doctor, who had risen at once at the permission, had taken up his heavy coat, which lay across a chair, and extracted a packet from its recesses.

"They are the first proofs," he said, "of my son-in-law's sonnets, which I was intrusted by Lucas Warden to deliver."

"You mean he writes?" snapped John.

"Certainly,—did you not know? Perhaps you would hand them to him, John,—I have a notion I had better not let on to Violet. They were aimed at her birthday, originally, so I was informed; and will consequently miss Christmas, and be ready very doubtfully for the New Year. Charles will not look out, or make up, the half-dozen more Warden needs to complete the book. Warden has run the first lot into print to encourage him. He told me he loved to see himself in print."

"There you are!" said John impatiently. "Everyone talks of him like that."

"It's a human weakness," said Claude, apologizing for Charles. "I like to see myself in print, too, awfully."

"When's the world going to see you?" said John, following him out to the hall. Having dismissed, he was aware of a wish to detain him.

"Never, at this rate." He tossed Charles' proofs on the table. "It won't be much loss to the world. I am coming to that conclusion." Claude swung about, and glanced up the stairway behind him. "Yes, Pussy-cat, we have finished: come along. Got your cloak? We will go outside, John, if you will excuse us."

"Is the great work not advancing?" persisted John, as Violet descended the last flight like a cascade, and was stayed from annihilation by her father's arm.

"That's not the way to put it, Cousin John," she

observed. "Is the great work steadily decreasing, Father dear?"

"Steadily," said Sir Claude serenely. "Ford wrote a page last month, and I tore up a chapter."

"Oh, you exquisites!" Mr. Ingestre looked from one to the other. "You're not going to drag her out, Claude? Nonsense, it's raining. Come to my room."

"You can't be so cruel, doctor," added Mrs. Shovell, laying her head against his arm. "I shall have to curl my hair again."

"We talk better walking," Claude explained to John, "that's the fact."

"Faster," said Violet. "Just show me exactly how long you have, to regulate my tempo accordingly." She caught his watch. "Oh, mercy,—no, I've not the breath! It can't be necessary, Father,—you overdo it, you know. You won't see Charles."

"I shall, if he's up to time," said Claude.

"He won't be," said Violet. "You can't seriously expect it, when he is running about with a ball."

"There you are!" said John again. "She's as bad as the rest." He shoved the proof-packet unconsciously with his hand, in irritation.

"What are those?" said the girl, her quick eye caught by the movement.

"Your husband's proofs," said her father at once. "Warden gave them me, to spare burdening the Christmas post."

"What has he been doing now?" said Violet, with resignation.

"Everything he shouldn't, as usual," said Sir Claude. "A pack of impartial effusions, my dear. You can settle him afterwards. Come along now."

"*Impartial?*" John was amused to see her color rise as she underlined the word. "Not truly, Father?"

"You'd better have a look," jibed John. "We can't afford impartiality in our poets, can we?"

She touched the packet for a minute with one little hand, then pushed it from her with decision.

"Mr. Warden's been flattering him, I suppose. Oh dear, isn't he tiresome? He might tell me, at least."

"Come along," repeated Claude, with the impatience of a boy, holding her furred cloak. Having her inside it, he wrapped it closely all about her, and swept her in the same movement towards the garden door. Before they reached it she was chattering to him low, and John heard her little laugh at his reply. He had the old sensation, on witnessing it, of a fine harmony,—two beings in perfect tune, physical and mental. They would have walked together, or danced, he was sure, with the same light ease that they conversed. Young as he still looked, at least in action, they might have been brother and sister rather than father and child. He had had the same impression from Claude's fashion of speaking of her in the late dialogue,—that of sheer friendliness. The girl had the rare spirit that is friendly to man; and with this man alone she could offer all she had at her ease, being sure of the fair exchange.

Mr. Ingestre did not get as far as this last thought, naturally: but he felt enlightened a little, for all Claude's reticence, and he took immediate measures to become more so; for, at their departure, he laid hands,—most unrighteous hands,—on Charles' proofs. John was used to playing tyrant, and doing what he liked in his own house; and this, to his ideas, was only going a little beyond his rights, if at all. It was his business to investigate the state of things, if Claude would not; and anyhow, the investigation was likely to be amusing.

It was purely so, for long. He spent a most interesting hour over Charles' "effusions," until the light failed. The verses were excellent reading, and stood the fire even of John's criticism wonderfully well. The workmanship was good, and the feeling creditable. They were addressed to some dozen of different females, as Mr. In-

gestre expected, and the discovery vaguely gratified him. One or two were deliberately light, in his personal vein of drollery, but those were the exceptions. In the majority, he seemed serious enough.

Then, at the tail-end, John came upon the sheaf of honeymoon sonnets, each betraying itself artlessly to a curious world by a place-name and a date. There was even one about John's own house, which tickled both his humor and his family pride. The rest dealt with various subjects, but chiefly with Charles. The second person singular occurred in them, as was proper, here and there, but very delicately disseminated; I, my, and myself were commoner. John smiled grimly, reading; but he began to have his doubts, as he went along, first, if the boy should publish this sort of thing: and secondly, whether he should read. It was all terribly young, innocent, and obvious,—like Charles; but it had something else which John, merciless critic as he was, admitted as he pursued. He had the gift, this boy,—he wielded the power which John did not seek to define, beyond that it swayed his senses pleasurably, and touched him now and then. Artless as the tongue seemed that he used, it was the tongue transmitted from the first best masters of our lyric verse. It struck John, as with many young poets, that Charles had read before he wrote: but he had drenched himself in the right school. He had not squandered time over Rosetti and the moderns. He teased the language, and fidgeted his phrases at times: but his aim was precise in general, and his taste pure. John, still doubting whether he should read, read on persistently, and even went through some of them twice; to test the measure and rhythm, not to understand. Their lucidity throughout was their first charm.

Then he came to a poem about a lighthouse, and read it three times through before he understood it at all, and stopped over it for long.

He stopped, first, because it was by far the best he had

reached, and different in style—strangely intimate and tender, even a trifle shy. It had borrowed another character. Next, because it was absolutely difficult, written, as it were, in cipher, and needing both thought and sympathy in the reader to interpret. Thirdly, because it had a tang of the unusual,—the use of words was quaint. "Impartial" was an odd word, for instance,—the lighthouse "scattered its impartial light," in the second line,—and recalled to John an Ashwin dialogue lately. It certainly did not sound like Charles. Having fairly made it out, Mr. Ingestre decided it was "deuced pretty," and summoned his wife, who was passing through the hall, to come and agree with him.

"He was tolerably far gone then, at any rate," observed John, handing the page to her. "Just look at that."

"Who gave you this?" said Agatha, when she had looked.

"Claude left them," said John unblushing. "What do you think of it?"

"I think the girl would object, with reason, if she knew."

"Get along," said John. "She'd be delighted." But he recollected the girl's change of color at her father's allusion as he spoke.

"Violet is shy," said Agatha, "really shy. It's not fair of the boy to '*afficher*' her."

"I tell you women love it," said John, neglecting the fact that he was speaking to one. Agatha did not count when he generalized on the subject. "When do you suppose," he proceeded, having let her read it through again, "he added the fifteenth line?"

"That is what I was wondering," she answered. "It must have been some time after composition, to make sense."

The lines to the lighthouse had neither date nor dedication, but Charles had taken a motto to his sonnet from

another, and it stood printed small, but for all the world to read, across the top.

"Thyself thou gav'st, thy own worth then not knowing."

That was the "fifteenth line."

"Where does it come from?" said John, after a pause.

"Elizabethan, I should think," said Agatha.

"I could have got as far as that. There are a dozen Elizabethans." Then, as she only shrugged—"What's the good of you?" he said crossly, struggling to his feet. "Claude would have known." He took down some volumes from his shelves.

"It's likely to be Shakespeare," said Agatha presently. "Violet says he reads nothing else."

"Why couldn't you say so sooner?" said John, and put up the book he had chosen to take down another.

Presently he found it, and read her the sonnet, his voice changing oddly, its rasping accent vanishing, to do justice to art, and to woman, of course, by the way. It was superb nonsense, as he said,—the last word in eulogy, some of the finest flattery ever penned. John approved of flattery, and thoroughly enjoyed the courtly style: though he snapped his wife most uncivilly short in all the comments she made upon it, until he reached the finishing couplet—

"Thus have I had thee, as a dream may flatter
In sleep a King——."

"A King writes," said Agatha, in a kind of exultation. "He can't disguise it."

"A ramshackle playwright wrote it," said John, for the sake of contradiction, "in love with a soubrette."

Agatha, who was aware that the lines in question had been addressed, in the original instance, to a man, did not contradict him, though her eyes showed grim amusement. Her "scores" over John were generally private, and in the present case, possessing "the girl's" full confidence,

she was more than ever inclined to hug the facts she knew. It was the woman's conspiracy, well-known where such as John are concerned.

"Those men," she observed, "were in love with their own language,—nothing more. I expect the lady was a dream."

"What do you mean by that?" said John.

"Imaginary,—why not? Shakespeare had dreams enough to draw upon. It often surprises me the commentators never think of that. No real woman was ever worthy of words like those."

John looked vexed. "What does it signify if she was worthy? She wasn't probably. It's the last thing likely in the case. But she was there,—and we have got the sonnets."

"And leave them in the shelves," said Agatha, turning to the door.

"Well, little Shovell doesn't," said John. He threw Shakespeare aside, and limped back to Charles' proofs.

"It's a deuced nice way to treat a woman," was his final opinion. "I shouldn't have said the boy was capable of it. I like him better than I did."

III

When Charles came in, among the very last and dirtiest group of the day's heroes, he espied Violet's skirts just vanishing round the turn of the staircase as he attained the hall. He was exactly an hour later than he had promised her, but quite serene, of course: as though people had not been waiting for him, and delaying their affairs in town for him, for half the afternoon.

"Hullo, darling," he called, shamelessly loud, since he needed to detain her. "Turn on the bath, if you are going up."

"Don't," counseled Johnny, who followed Charles. "Keep him in his place, Violet."

"I shouldn't think of it," said Violet, preparing to re-

treat. As the hall below her was filling with dirty heroes, very loud of tongue, and all half-dressed, it seemed no more than kind to do so.

"Governor gone?" demanded the shameless Charles.

"The governor has. The Queen or somebody wanted him. He sent his obsequious apologies."

"Give you anything?" said Charles.

"Naturally," said Violet.

"Decent?" said Charles.

"Naturally; and he left that note for you."

"Which?"

"Under your nose,—with the parcel. Oh, show him, John, will you? He's blind."

"You're drunk, Shovell," said Johnny, indicating it. Mrs. Shovell above slipped round the corner of the staircase.

"Christmas present?" shouted Charles, louder than ever, in her wake.

"From Mr. Warden," she called back dryly. "Returned with thanks, I understand."

"Little beast," muttered Charles; but he himself had sought publicity. There was exactly one circle among Mr. Shovell's immense acquaintance from whom he would have preferred to disguise his literary aspirations, and he stood among them at this moment.

With a yell of delight, John Ingestre the younger cast himself upon the sheaf of proofs: and several others of Charles' dear friends followed him. The poet, just from the fray, had to gird on his armor once more, and fight for his own,—not to mention hers,—against considerable odds. He just succeeded in wresting the printed matter from their hands; but the fact that Shovell wrote verses, and was in the habit of being rejected by his publishers was, owing to Violet, deeply rooted in all their minds: and as the frame of their heroic minds was a happy, not to say a hungry one, one subject served them amply for the whole of dinner-time. The second fact, as Charles

continued fruitlessly to assert, was false. It was slightly the more amusing of the two, so nobody attended to him.

"It's not the case, sir," said Charles, turning to his host, in extremity. "It's the opposite of the truth. That's what she generally tells."

"You don't mean Warden wants more of the same sort?" said John, who was watching him steadily, in his valiant struggle against numbers. Detected as he was, and the center of attention, he was not at all confused; and he gave quite as good as he got, whenever he could make anybody listen to him.

"No," he said. "Warden wants more, a little different. Sir Claude says so, in his letter."

"About a different girl?" said John. "Between ourselves, Shovell, I should say there were quite enough for one volume already."

"Well," said Charles, after a short pause devoted to choosing between three dishes, "Warden thinks there aren't. And Sir Claude, who has read 'em,—more than can be said for any of you,—thinks the same. And I'd take his opinion in front of anybody's," finished Charles. "Anybody here." He recurred to his dinner.

"You did not seem very anxious to hear it," said John. "I quite see now why you avoided Claude. He might have been severe on the subject. He would sooner you had stuck to one girl, I mean. So would Violet there, I shouldn't wonder."

"She doesn't care a hang," said Charles. "She hasn't asked to look at 'em, even,—this time."

"Hullo!" said Mr. Ingestre. "Was there another time? When was that?"

"Oh, years ago, before I was engaged. She read those fast enough. And my stuff's improved a lot since then," added Charles reflectively, "if she knew."

"Poor girl," said John, not loud, but with sufficient clearness to carry down the table. Several people looked at Mrs. Shovell, hoping she would be lured to take a hand.

"Hasn't he written about you at all, since then, Violet?" said Johnnie compassionately, following his father's lead. "Rotten luck." And the jest was taken up in other directions, and repeated in other words.

"He did, once," said Violet, when she could no longer avoid it. "Some quite nice ones. But Father says he revised them."

"When?" cried John the elder, across the renewed clamor of derision and delight.

"When he wrote them?—Down by the sea one summer, when he had time."

"When he revised them," said John. "That's a deal more important."

"Oh——" she looked serious,—“I can't exactly say. Father caught him at it, when I was not about. Father takes a great interest," added Violet. "Always did."

John looked at her hard. Then he looked at Charles, who had not changed color, though he had shot one speaking glance at her between two mouthfuls. Conversation surged up again about her, cutting him off, had he been inclined to retaliate. But he seemed, on reflection, to prefer his food.

"I only added one line to one of 'em," he murmured to his neighbor. "That's not revising. Beastly low down, I call it, of Sir Claude."

"Your own line?" inquired Mr. Ingestre,—“or somebody else's?"

Mr. Shovell stopped feeding himself for some three seconds, and John had the full glance of his blue eyes. Then he turned back to his partner again without replying: but John had all the answer he needed to the question he had debated with his wife. It was during the girl's illness, evidently, that Charles had added the fifteenth line.

Mr. Ingestre did all things deliberately, whether graceful or the reverse. At the tail-end of the magnificent

meal, on moving from the dining-room to the hall, he overtook Violet's husband and laid a hand upon his arm. He often availed himself of a young arm in this way, and, as the youth John gathered about his board were well-bred, they were generally willing enough to be useful. Mr. Shovell, who was aiming at the billiard-room, slackened to accommodate him.

"I hope you have had a good dinner, Charles," said John.

"Very, thanks," said Charles, slightly surprised. The Ingestres did not commonly use his first name,—had not, at least, hitherto. He had remained quite contentedly without the ring.

"Then I have some hope to be excused," said John, in his best manner: which was very good. "I own I snatched your proofs from the hall and read them. It was indefensible, but Claude had made me curious. Your wife, I may add, refused to do the like, on provocation."

"She knows most of 'em already," said Charles, in the correct schoolboy tone of indifference. They came to a stand in the center of the hall, the crowd having passed them to the billiard-room.

"The lighthouse?" said John.

"Yes,—she saw that when it was written. Think we wrote it together," said Charles,—“all but one line.”

"Just so. May I know when that line was added?"

"When she was so frightfully ill that time. I'd nothing else to do," said Charles.

"But sing her praises," suggested John. "Or make Shakespeare do so."

"Well, he'd have liked it," said Charles. "He's just the fellow who would."

"Liked what?"

"What she did; when she eloped with her father's chauffeur, and met us at Dover in the rain. Perhaps you never heard that yarn?" His color had risen, and his look, to John's eyes, was pure pride.

"Ah, yes, I heard. She suffered for it, didn't she?" He waited for the boy to complain, knowing he had suffered too.

"She nearly died," said Charles.

"It was plucky," suggested John, adopting that view,—call it the boy's view,—the one Charles said Shakespeare would have shared.

"It took my wind, when I thought about it afterwards," said Charles.

"Not at the time."

"I was worried at the time."

John accepted it,—facer to his theory as it was. He had to: one could not possibly doubt Charles' sincerity. After an interval, as the young man still stood in front of him, he said:

"Perhaps I should mention, she turned crimson when Claude said the poem was in print."

"Did she?" Charles gave him that direct brief look again. "Oh well, that settles it," he said simply. "I don't mean to add to them, and Warden won't bind it as it stands. It will just lie over,—better so."

"Did it not strike you she would mind?" John pressed him.

"No," said Charles, after a pause. "Warden says it's the best of the lot."

"So does her father,—so do I. It is a beautiful little poem." The poet colored again, just sufficiently. Fair as he was, Charles was not given to blushing, but he did so twice in this conversation. "Will you copy it for me, since it is not to be published?" said John.

"I don't mind, if she doesn't," said Charles, after another pause.

"Right," said John, unconsciously aloud. "Will you ask her, or shall I?"

Before the next pause could be prolonged—"There she is," said Charles. He held out his hand, and snapped his fingers, as a white shape crossed the shadow under the

stairs. She came to his side on the instant, and was, as promptly, stolen by John's arm.

"Hullo,—what's that?" said Mr. Ingestre, diverted for a moment by the glint of the jewel round her neck. He seized and examined it, with his fine fingers, and hawk-like eyes. "That's not mine."

"No, it's Father's, he brought for me to-day. I had to wear it, since he couldn't stay to dinner. Do you mind terribly, just for to-night?"

She lifted her eyes to him. She had cried since her father went, as John knew, for he had rashly tried to waylay her by force, when she came back from the gate. He had regretted the attempt, for her wrath had scorched him passingly. Since then, neither he nor Agatha had seen her. She had had more confidences than he, in the matter of her mother, John could only suppose.

"Yes," he said, when he had investigated her father's gift, and her, at his leisure. "I do mind terribly. Go and change."

"I would have put on both," she assured him, "only they swear together."

"Well, that's what your father and I do when we meet," said John.

"Oh no, he doesn't. Father was in a beautiful temper, when he came to me."

"Go and change," said Mr. Ingestre grimly.

"Oh dear!" said Violet, turning from him. "What are those frightfully trampled girls called, in books like *Ivanhoe*, with baronial castles?"

"Wards," said Charles, at a venture.

"That's it, dear,—how clever of you! Downtrodden nieces, aren't they, generally? I was always so thankful when the poor thing got married, after the most terrible time."

"He must be confusing you with Miss Addenbroke," said Charles, with a bright idea.

"You're mixing me with Honoria, Cousin John!" She

slipped under his arm, caught her husband's, and faced him, triumphantly mischievous.

"Curse Honoria," said Mr. Ingestre, as no doubt the baron would have said in a like situation. "Let go, Shovell, I haven't finished. Hang it, I've not begun!"

"Go to blazes," returned Charles, taking up the part assigned to him. "Never you fear, ducky,—you've married me. We got safe away beyond the bloodhounds,—slew dozens of 'em,—remember?"

"Into the Duchy,—so we did. We are out of your power, Cousin John: you can't do anything. Our story finished nicely, in spite of you."

"It's not finished yet," said John, looking grimly upon the pair of them. It was hard to look grim, however indignant one might inwardly be with fate. The shadow of the unjust fate that had haunted her throughout those three years lay still about her eyes this night of festival. She was bearing her father's burden, John was sure, even while she jested lightly with him and Charles; and the chances were, that Claude's Christmas in town was the better for it.

"Quite absolutely ended," she assured him gravely. "I'm twenty-three."

"What's that got to do with it?—Twenty-three!" Mr. Ingestre laughed in spite of himself. "Look here, now, Violet." The tyrant stooped to bargaining. "Haven't I done my best for you, wards or none? Haven't I used you well?"

They looked at one another, considering it.

"Jolly good dinner," admitted the gentleman.

"It was frightfully pretty," said the lady, her fine hand clutching her father's Christmas gift. "I will wear it to-morrow, I promise,—every single day till I go."

"It's not enough. I am not content. I want something from each of you, here and now."

"What?" She turned to Charles, who informed her low-toned. She grew serious while he told her, her gray eyes leveled beyond John.

"Oh yes." A pause. "You may have his thing, Cousin John. That will be all right."

"Thanks, Charles," said John. "Now for the other."

"But I gave you mine this morning. Particularly nicely worked, it was." She clung to Charles. "It's too late for giving, really, now."

"Excuses," said Mr. Ingestre. "Are you aware where you are standing?"

"Under your roof-tree, of course. It's a very nice one——"

"Particularly nice," said the tyrant.

"Look out," Charles muttered. "Look up."

She looked up. She became aware of Mr. Ingestre's roof-tree, and of what depended from it. She was far too quick for Mr. Ingestre, and just too quick for Charles. Before either could so much as snatch, she was well beyond reach, and half-way up the first broad flight of stairs.

Having so eluded, she stood a moment radiant above them, and well above the fatal bough. Then she swept down again, and from the vantage-ground of the third or fourth stair, caught the tall baron's head.

"You'd rather have taken it," she informed him. "You don't care to be given things that you could seize with fire and slaughter. You have a kind of Crusading feeling about it, haven't you, Cousin John?"

"That was how the Crusaders felt, was it?" said John. "You have the historical instinct, Violet: you are probably quite right. It sounds thoroughly religious, anyhow. Personally, I admit the charge. I care neither to be given, nor forgiven, in this life. I can't abide the sensation."

"I know," she said. "I am not forgiving, or giving you anything. I have nothing to forgive. *Au contraire*, I was just going quietly up to put on your necklace when I left you just now."

"That's a lie," said Mr. Ingestre: taking care, however, not to move.

"Which is prettier than Father's," proceeded Violet. "Less expensive, you know, but prettier."

"That's three," counted John. "Good ones, full measure. Don't stop, my love, I like mendacity. Do it again."

"I can't really,—it's too exhausting. I only gave Father one to-night,—told him one, I mean."

Mr. Ingestre took the wrist of the hand on his shoulder, to detain her. "Didn't I trespass, then, when I read the little poem? Have I not really to be excused?" Charles had proceeded on his way, by now.

"No,—I don't mind old men knowing,—I let Father. Father remembers his lighthouses very well . . . and so, I expect, do you."

"Go and change the necklace," said Mr. Ingestre, after a pause. He stood immovable not to disturb her, but his iron brow was fixed.

It was not till Mrs. Shovell reached her bedroom that she remembered, with something of a shock, her hostess's reference to her honeymoon, the first night.

Thus Charles discomfited the Ingestre philosophy, proving not only that he possessed a permanent part,—the first thing they discredited,—and that one woman could hold it: but that she had held it most firmly, by his own written confession, at the moment when she considered his interests least, when she had risked her dearest possession, with his, in another's cause.

How account for it? Since such powers in the land as his critics must be answered.

It may be, firstly, that all men are not alike: that there are a few characteristics in humanity with which such as John and Eveleen fail to reckon: and that imagination is one of them. It is possible, by this reckoning, that his poetry saved Charles from his mother-in-law's vulgar category. It is possible even that Shakespeare's poetry saved him. The idealist's imagination is actually a power in the physical world, far more than the proverb-makers and platitude-mongers believe. It works the miracles,

often, from which they prefer to turn away their eyes. Imagination,—that little messenger of the gods whom Keats and Shakespeare called Fancy,—working with the twin powers of sorrow and sympathy, may still disconcert that clamorous crew,—disappoint them at least, as Eveleen was disappointed in Charles,—though in the nature of things they will never be suppressed.

Next—but the spirit recoils. We have not Mrs. Ingestre's courage to advance in her husband's presence the claims of woman's intellect in the double life. Agatha herself was a miserable example of its efficacy, since she had lived thirty odd years at John's side without disturbing his established convictions in the least. He enjoyed her conversation daily, as he enjoyed Violet's,—that was all. The thing is of no use whatever, we understand, as a part of a woman's permanent equipment: and Mrs. Shovell was doubtless reconciled, before she finally quitted Agatha's house, to conquering by other means.

But there remains a goddess,—if she will excuse the title, and the company,—besides these, who may have lent a hand to help Charles to his discoveries, during the trials of that first year of married life. She turned in his direction, at least, once or twice, and he caught a gleam from her gray eyes: eyes like Violet's, cloud-colored and clear. This was the strong spirit of charity, served silently by so many,—by such as Claude Ashwin, and such as Marmaduke Jones. It is hard to determine how much Charles reached by this means, for he had lost himself rather in chatter and chaff on the subject of that other story that touched his; and he could hardly even now, in retrospect, take Jones quite seriously. His other little visitor, Fancy, had played him false in this case,—obscured the issues rather, and spoiled the moral, for Charles. But a core remained, a core of humanity and truth in the character-study he had inflated so gaily for the delectation of his friends; and it is probable he retained that core, or Violet retained it for him, when the rest of Jones' narrative was cast away.

NOTE

For the curious in literary matters only, we append a note as to the fate of Charles' sonnets.

In the September of that New Year, Mr. and Mrs. Shovell, who happened to be spending the holidays quietly in town, capitulated simultaneously; and Mr. Warden actually published the book, with the honeymoon cycle complete, and a brand-new set as well. The correspondence had better be given.

"DEAR SHOVELL,

"Am I, or am I not, to have that extra stuff? It will miss her birthday a second time, unless you prod Pegasus.

"Am I to include the lighthouse with fifteen lines?

"Is she really all right, and what is the full name? Tell her I expect a literary letter soon. Love to both—not you.

"Faithfully yours,

"LUCAS WARDEN."

"DEAR WARDEN,

"Rather. Herewith several, and you can choose. Personally I think there's nothing to choose between them, they are all dashed good. I am writing all day,—nothing else to do in London in the vac. Besides, you ought to see them together, both of them in white, a pair of kids! She is as well as possible, and simply plays the giddy-goat with the child,—calls it educational experiments. Her language grows longer as soon as she looks at it,—no earthly girl of eight weeks could understand. She is at it out there at this minute,—I can see Brading's shocked face of protest. Margaret Ashwin is the Midget's name, not that she's ever called it, but if for an inscription, as I suppose, you had better have it right. Sorry you are done out of god-paternity, but the Church down at Glass-

well tells V. that one oldish man is enough for a girl. V. herself has dozens, but that's because her parents are ungodly, I always supposed."

He had written so much when Violet came into the study from the garden and directed him to come out.

"Can't,—I'm busy," said Charles. So she came to see what his absurd business was, and read both letters through.

"Of course I will," she said cordially to the request in the first; and taking the first seat that came, which was Charles' knee, and the pen out of his pocket, she added a line to her old friend on what was left of his sheet, in her pretty, rather shaken hand.

"Come and see Margery Shovell soon; you would like her dearly. She is not like other children—sudden. She is discreet, an anachronism, like me. She does everything I ask her, very carefully, and looks at me first, to be sure. I asked her yesterday not to be so good that she will die at the end of the story,—and she cried immediately, for just half an hour, and disturbed the doctor writing his big book. Wasn't it thoughtful? But we had to explain to grandgodpapa when he came. . . . It is not the trouble, as Annette says, to give people beautiful names. Charles has already reduced it *ad absurdum* to Midgery, and Father says Miss Miggs, from the author you disdain. They are all so horrid about her size,—as if people don't grow!"

About there Violet determined to be literary, and consulted the original document for the materials.

"It surely hasn't fifteen lines," she said, with a little laugh. "We weren't off our heads to that extent?"

"It has," said Charles.

"Nonsense,—but I remember! Twelve, and a nice couplet. That makes fourteen, doesn't it?—Yes."

"If you doubt my words," said Charles, "it's in **that** drawer."

She did not seem to be attending. She sat on his knee, pen in hand, pensively pulling at her little curl.

"The idea of a sonnet with fifteen lines pleases me," she explained her abstraction suddenly. "It's blue-moonish. You are rootedly unconventional, Charles. That's why I like you, largely."

"All right," said Charles, bearing it. "When you have quite done with my pen——"

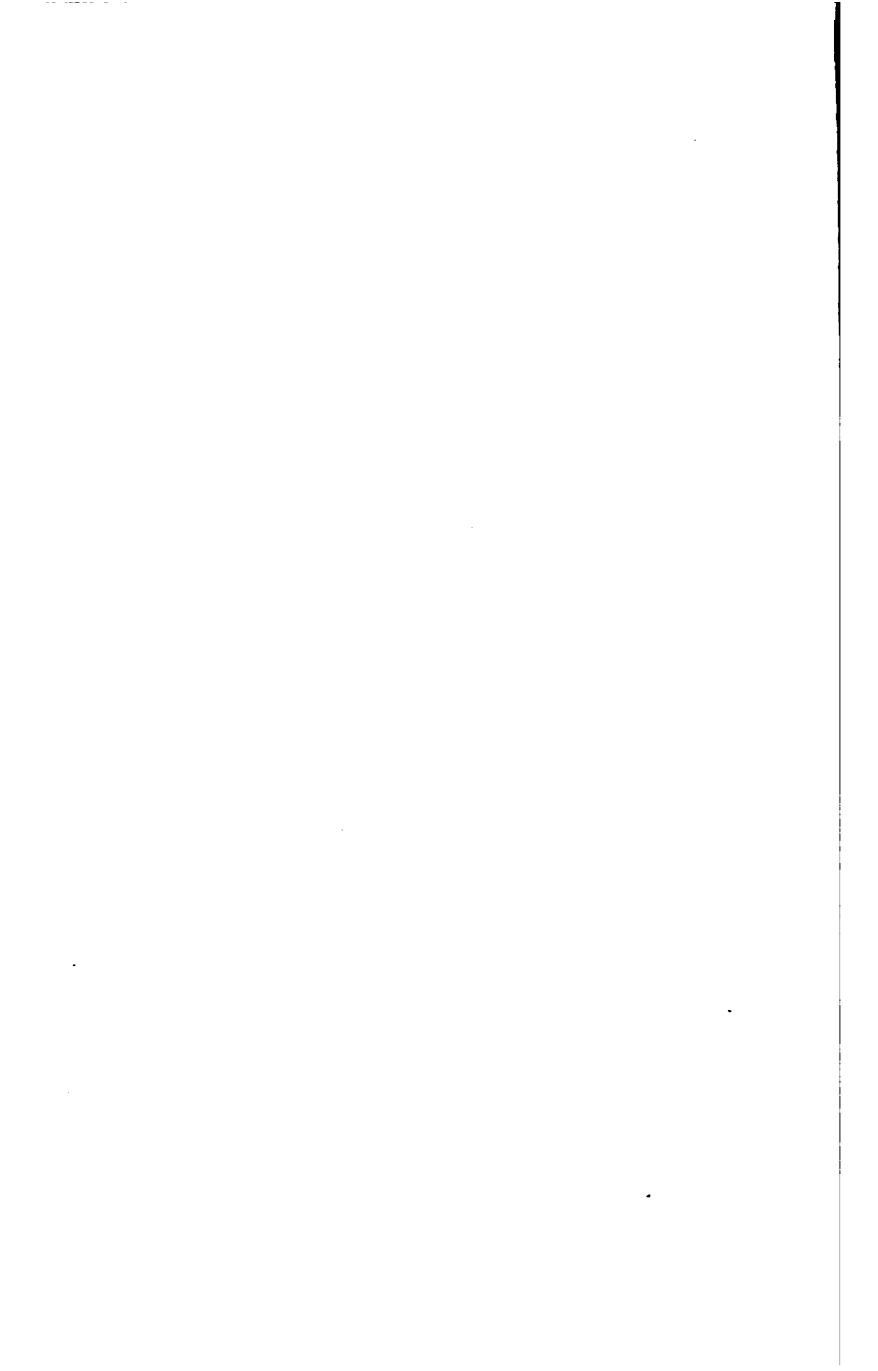
"I haven't, quite."

Mrs. Shovell concluded her literary letter.

"Of course, you may put in the lighthouse poem, or any rubbish you like. If the extra line is too shocking the Censor will stop it, we can't be bothered now. Margery likes lights in houses, I asked her,—but she prefers steady ones to look at, not dodging about. She does not admire impartiality. She argues so well, when we are alone, that I am afraid I am coming round to her opinion. Don't tell Charles——"

At this point there was a blank, and a blot. Which things were explained, in an elegant postscript added some twenty minutes later, to be the fault of Charles' nasty pen.

q⁷





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